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THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY: A STUDY
IN AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE TO THE
WEST INDIES, 1672-1689

by

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CHAPTER I

ENGLISH TRADE TO WEST AFRICA--

EARLY INTEREST

English merchants were interested in trade to West Africa as early as 1481. In that year two Englishmen, John Tintam and William Fabian, planned an expedition to Guinea. The Dutch and Portuguese for the most part controlled the Guinea trade, and upon hearing of the Englishmen's plans, King John II of Portugal sent an emissary to the English sovereign with a protest.¹ The Portuguese emissary announced John's claim over Guinea, and protested that the proposed voyage of Tintam and Fabian would be illegal according to privileges granted John by the Pope. Edward IV complied with the Portuguese objection. Edward then himself requested papal permission to trade in Africa, but nothing came of his request.²

Hakluyt states that English traders were engaged in the commerce of the Canary Islands by 1526, and probably were somewhat familiar with the Guinea coast by 1530, possibly earlier. It is believed that William Hawkins, leader of a

¹Richard Hakluyt, The Principall Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1907), VI, pp. 121-24.

²Ibid., VI, pp. 121-24.

group of merchants trading to Brazil, stopped at the north Guinea coast enroute to Brazil in 1530, 1531, and 1532.¹ In 1553, Captain Thomas Windham was hired by a group of merchants to lead an expedition to Africa. Near Elmina, on the Gold Coast, the adventurers sold some of their goods for gold. At nearby Benin they obtained pepper, or "Guinea grains," and elephants' teeth. The expedition returned to England, but lost over one-half of the crew from sickness.² In the following year another expedition, this time under Captain John Lok, secured several slaves in addition to a large amount of gold and other products.³

In successive years, 1555, 1556, William Towerson made voyages to the Guinea coast. Despite Portuguese interference and harassment, a profitable trade was obtained, attributed in large part to the demand for English cloth and iron wares along the Guinea coast.⁴

The above-described voyages and expeditions involved merchants and sea-faring captains with little or no assistance from the British Crown. In 1561, Queen Elizabeth I offered

¹Hakluyt, XI, pp. 23-24. Also see James A. Williamson, Hawkins of Plymouth, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1949), pp. 10-11. An excellent record of the life and trading ventures of William Hawkins may be found in Williamson, pp. 2-31. At this time the name, 'Guinea,' referred to the stretch of West African Coast from the Senegal River to the Bight of Biafra. Elizabeth Donnan (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1930), I, n. 8.

²Hakluyt, VI, pp. 141-52.

³Ibid., VI, pp. 154-77.

⁴Ibid., VI, pp. 177-252.

her influence and financial assistance to a series of voyages to the African coast. In the same year she not only permitted the use of four royal vessels for an expedition but she spent five hundred pounds in provisioning them for the voyage. Although the venture was not an unqualified success, the Queen's one-third share of the profits amounted to £1,000.¹ Coupled with their trading activities, this expedition had been directed to select a site for an English fort on the west coast of Africa; the English up to this time had shown no desire to establish any permanent settlements on the Guinea coast, although a friendly chief had offered English traders the privilege of building a fort within his territory.² The group of merchants promoting the voyage had proposed to John Lok,³ a British shipmaster, that he lead the expedition. After two unsuccessful starts and with the season of bad weather approaching, Lok asked to be released from his contract. He denied there was reason to fear the Portuguese, although he reported that four "great ships" of Portugal were on the Guinea coast waiting for him.⁴ His promoters were

¹William R. Scott, The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-stock Companies to 1720, (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1910-12), II, pp. 5-6. Queen Elizabeth's profit may have been only five hundred pounds, as it seems likely that the five hundred pounds which she spent in provisioning the ships should be subtracted from the one thousand pounds which she received.

²Hakluyt, VI, p. 226.

³The more modern spelling of this name would be Locke.

⁴Ibid., VI, pp. 256-57.

insistent, however, and the vessels were dispatched, arriving on the coast early in 1562. In 1563 another fleet was sent, which traded both at the River Sestos and on the Gold Coast. In the course of trading, it was necessary to keep up a light but continual warfare with the Portuguese, and sickness took a heavy toll.¹ Despite the obstacles and discouragements, this same group sent out an expedition under David Carlet in 1564.² Three ships, one belonging to Queen Elizabeth, comprised this expedition. The results were rather discouraging, with an accidental powder explosion destroying one ship; the other two were attacked by the Portuguese and apparently returned without obtaining any African products.³

Until this time, most English trade in Guinea had been in exchange for gold, elephants' teeth and pepper. English merchants had shown little interest in the slave trade and had established no forts or settlements. English sailors were now familiar with the Guinea coast. By trading where they liked, they demonstrated the alleged Portuguese control to be more of a myth than fact. It was the famous John Hawkins, and to some extent his father, William, who realized the great commercial gains the West Indies would yield with the application of slave labor. In large measure, these men were responsible for consequent British interest in the

¹Ibid., VI, pp. 253-61.

²Ibid., VI, p. 262.

³Ibid., VI, p. 267. Williamson, pp. 57-58. Scott, II, pp. 7-8.

slave trade. Although the Spanish asserted sole claim to American markets, John Hawkins' buccaneering feats were to prove that the Spanish monopoly was unenforceable.¹

John Hawkins in 1562 commanded three vessels in an expedition to the West African coast; at Sierra Leone the party captured three hundred Negroes, transported them to Hispaniola and sold them to the Spanish.² Spurred by this success, in 1564 a second expedition was prepared for the securing of slaves; Queen Elizabeth loaned one of her ships, the Jesus, for the venture. Hawkins, again the leader, sold his slaves in the Spanish West Indies,³ but not without interference by Spanish officials. The Spanish merchants were not permitted to engage in commercial dealings without governmental consent, and the English were therefore considered to be pirates.⁴ Hawkins again led an expedition in 1567. He managed to secure about 450 slaves which he transported to the Spanish West Indies. Despite early promise of a profitable voyage, Hawkins was later attacked by a number of Spanish ships and was fortunate to escape with his life and one ship which just managed to stay afloat.⁵ After Hawkins' third voyage had ended in disaster, there

¹Donnan, I, p. 10.

²Hakluyt, X, pp. 7-8.

³The Spanish West Indies at this time included all the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico) and minor island holdings in the Lesser Antilles.

⁴Hakluyt, X, pp. 9-63.

⁵Ibid., X, pp. 64-70.

seems to be no record of any English voyages to the Guinea coast for about twenty years. It is likely, however, that there were a few voyages during this period.¹ Hawkins' voyages to Africa are particularly important because he was the first Englishman to engage in the slave trade. Rather than negotiate with native chiefs for the purchase of slaves, he broke all recognized rules of conduct along the African coast by his unethical and outright seizure of free Negroes. As a result of his dishonorable dealings, the natives were suspicious of all Englishmen for some time thereafter.²

A group of merchants of London, Devonshire, and Exeter, in 1588 petitioned Queen Elizabeth for a monopoly of the trade to the west coast of Africa.³ At this time England and Spain were at war. In granting the charter, which was dated May 3, 1588, Elizabeth extended to these merchants for ten years an exclusive trade to that portion of West Africa lying between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers. It is rather surprising that this charter did not include the great slave and gold country of the Gold Coast; the area included in the charter was well to the north of the Gold Coast, which remained open to all traders. Apparently the company's chief commerce was to be in the trade of English goods for the usual African items, rather than in the slave

¹Donnan, I, p. 10.

²George F. Zook, The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa, (Lancaster, Pa: Press of the New Era Printing Co., 1919), p. 5.

³Hakluyt, VI, pp. 443-50.

trade. The charter specified that the company would be exempt from taxes on imports and exports.¹

There was nothing in the charter of 1583 that prevented anyone from trading to the Gold Coast and surrounding area. Two London merchants, John Bird and John Newton, sponsored two expeditions to Benin, in the general area of the Gold Coast; one expedition was sent out in 1583 and the other in 1590.² Apparently, these expeditions did not trade in Negroes.³ With Thomas Gregory as their leader, five merchants of Taunton in 1592 received the right of exclusive trade between the Nunoe and Magrabumbo Rivers in the Sierra Leone area.⁴

For about the next twenty-five years there seems to have been little significant English trade to the Guinea coast. A group of about thirty merchants was granted on November 16, 1618, a patent for the sole trade of a region which included most of the known area of the west coast of Africa.⁵ This company was called the "Company of Adventurers

¹Ibid., VI, p. 444.

²Ibid., VI, pp. 450-67.

³Ibid., VI, pp. 450-67.

⁴Donnan, I, p. 139. Donnan states it is likely the Magrabumbo refers actually to the Sierra Leone River, and that its name was changed to the Malimbo River during the 1600's. Donnan, I, n. 11.

⁵Scott, II, pp. 11-14. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies, 1574-1660, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office), p. 20. (Hereafter referred to as C.S.P. Col.) Cecil T. Carr (ed.), Select Charters of Trading Companies, 1530-1707, (London: E. Quaritch, 1913), pp. xlv, 99-106.

of London Trading into Parts of Africa." It is said that one of the patentees, Sir Robert Rich, had a plan to use this company to transport African slaves to the new colony of Virginia. If this were true, the idea was not implemented.¹ This company seems to have been plagued by misfortune. Its primary business was the trading of English goods for African products; but only meager profits were obtained and in a number of instances ships even failed to return. This company sent out three expeditions, each of which resulted in a discouraging financial loss;² after losing a total of over £5,000 on its three efforts, it gave up its trading activities.³ Due to its unprofitable record, backers of this company soon found it almost impossible to secure additional capital.⁴ The company did examine the trading possibilities along the Gambia River and should be credited with the establishment of the first English fort in Africa.⁵

Although its commercial attempts were failures, this group of merchants by its patent could exclude other traders from the west African coast. Also, it had the power to issue permits to other merchants to trade in its territory, as was the practice of the Spanish and Portuguese. Of course this

¹Donnan, I, p. 79.

²C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 27.

³Scott, II, pp. 12-13.

⁴Ibid., II, p. 13.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 339.

monopoly was not liked by other merchants.¹ In 1624 six merchants, Nicholas Crispe, William Clobery, Sir Kenelm Digby, George Kirke, Humphrey Slaney, and Sir Richard Young complained that the company had secured privileges by "untrue suggestion," and that the patent was therefore not valid.² They charged that the group which held the monopoly had neither used nor appreciated their rights, and because of their lack of concern the French and Dutch had constantly violated the company's area of privilege, even built forts in some cases. On the other hand, the complaining group asserted that its members prior to 1618 had raised stock, established processing facilities, constructed houses, and had maintained a regular trade which occupied one thousand tons of shipping; all this, they complained bitterly, was lost when the patent of 1618 was issued.³ As a result of these accusations, the charter was found to be a "grievance" by the House of Commons. Although the independent traders or interlopers did not usually go to the bother to secure permits, the holders of the monopoly granted in 1618 did occasionally issue licenses for trade within their territory.⁴

Upon requesting protection of the Privy Council in 1626, George Digby and others, "the Governor and Company of

¹Donnan, I, p. 79.

²C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 62. Carr, p. 99, n. 2.
For full text of company charter see Carr, pp. 99-106.

³C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 62.

⁴Scott, II, pp. 12-13.

Guiney and Binney," were promised two vessels to guard them from attack in order to "pursue a hopeful discovery."¹ Sir Thomas Button and several other merchants in 1627 received letters of marque² to trade to Guinea.³ The Privy Council shortly thereafter directed that all trading to Guinea was to be forbidden in favor of the "patentees" of 1613.⁴ However, a group of independent traders in 1629 requested damages of the patentees for two vessels, the Benediction and the James Bonaventure; these ships had been captured while trading in the River Senegal.⁵ Apparently the government subtly ignored the privileges it had granted in 1613 and extended its protection also to independent Guinea traders.

With Nicholas Crispe as its leader, the same group which in 1624 had petitioned against the Company of Adventurers of London Trading into Parts of Africa applied to Charles I in 1631 for the right to the sole commerce to "Guinea, Binney and Angola." Charles granted the request in June, 1631, which was to be in effect for a period of thirty-one years; the patent authorized exclusive trading rights on the

¹C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 82. Throughout the accounts of the trade to West Africa, Samin is occasionally referred to as "Binney" or "Guiny."

²Permission or license to trade.

³Great Britain, Public Record Office, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1628-29, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office), p. 297. (Hereafter referred to as C.S.P. Dom.)

⁴C.S.P. Dom., 1627-29, p. 270.

⁵C.S.P. Dom., 1629-31, pp. 45-105.

west African coast from Cape Blanco (20° North) to the cape of Good Hope (34° South).¹ Crispe was well known for his interloping activities, and had been the frequent target of the holders of the patent of 1613 concerning accusations of interloping.² Crispe in 1624 had been responsible for the establishment of the first permanent English settlement at Cormantine.³ There were reports that Crispe by 1644 could claim ownership to fifty per cent of the assets of this new group.⁴ A highly profitable voyage in 1636 transported gold and other African items to England; the cargo was valued at £30,000.⁵ Of course this success brought almost immediate interference by the interlopers; two independent ships, the Talbot and the Star of London, were determined to trade within the limits of the group's charter, and for two years it was a question of whether the vessels could be restrained from sailing. Crispe and his men frequently requested the aid of the Admiralty to prevent it.⁶ Despite its auspicious

¹Carr, pp. xliv-xlv. C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 135. Scott, II, pp. 14-15. C.S.P. Dom., 1631-1633, p. 136, gives the date of the patent as June 25, 1631. Carr, who lists the date as 1632, calls it a lease, not an incorporation; its holders could make regulations and seize interlopers, but could not issue licenses, though they might take in new members. Scott lists the date as June 25, 1630.

²Zook, p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 6.

⁴Donnan, I, p. 81. Crispe, though apparently somewhat of a malcontent, appears to have been a shrewd businessman and trader. His name figures prominently in accounts of the African trade from about 1620 to 1670. His various activities are well treated in Zook, pp. 14-16.

⁵Carr, p. xlv. Scott, II, p. 15.

⁶C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, pp. 254-60.

start, financial troubles soon beset this company; in 1636 its creditors were asking the Privy Council for assistance in recovering their loans.¹ Regardless of these difficulties Charles I extended the company's privileges for twenty years just before his reign ended.² By 1644 Crispe owed the government about £16,000, and at the same time was labeled a monopolist by members of Parliament. As a result of his debt his holdings in the Guinea Company were appropriated.³

Regardless of its controversial status, the privileges of the merchants who held the patent of 1631 were held to be valid after Cromwell assumed control of the government. Puritan party members, however, expressed doubt concerning the validity of its monopoly. A group of independent traders led by Samuel Vassall, in 1649 and 1650 charged that its trading privileges had been obtained by "procurement of courtiers."⁴ In rebuttal, spokesmen for the company stated that the company had established a factory in 1632, gained ownership of Wiampa in 1633, and had helped to spread English influence by teaching the English language to the

¹C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 241. The company's financial operations and difficulties are briefly treated in Scott, II, pp. 14-15. For a brief period Prince Rupert served as its governor. Hilary Jenkinson, "The Record of the English African Companies," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, third series, VI, (1912), p. 195.

²Scott, II, pp. 14-16.

³Carr, p. xlv. What constituted Crispe's debt is not stated.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, pp. 331, 338.

King of Aguna's son. In addition it was pointed out that the company had helped the economy by bringing some £10,000 into England. If its privileges were renewed, the company pledged to prevent the Dutch from "overrunning" the Guinea coast.¹ Acting upon the recommendation of the Committee of Trade, the Council of State on April 9, 1651, extended the privileges of monopoly to the company for an additional fourteen years.² In the meantime, the membership of the company had changed; even Vassal, who just a short time before had been the leader in protesting the company's monopoly, was among the new patentees.³ The new privileges, however, included much less area than had been included in the original grant of 1631, being confined to twenty leagues "on each side of the two chief . . . residences by the sea coast, the fort of Cormantin, and the river Cerberro⁴ near Sierra Leone." Within these drastically limited boundaries the company was instructed to advance the interests of England in matters of trade and fortification.⁵

Despite the fact that the company invested some £70,000 on the Guinea coast and had protection of Cromwell's government, hostility and competition from the royal forces

¹C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, pp. 339-42, 345. Carr, pp. xlv-xlv, n. 4.

²Donnan, I, p. 82.

³Ibid., I, p. 82.

⁴More commonly known as Sherbro.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 355. Scott, I, pp. 248-50; II, p. 16.

and foreign competition made profitable business highly unlikely.¹ Prince Rupert, with the aid of the Portuguese, captured the company's vessel, the Friendship, in 1652: the company promptly demanded retribution and at the same time requested assistance in combatting the Dutch.² A group of Swedish traders forced the company's servants from the English factory at Accra; as a result a formal protest and a demand for retribution were registered by the English minister to Sweden.³ During the period that the Royalist forces were out of power, the company lost some £300,000 in its Guinea trading venture, and it soon gave up its futile efforts.⁴

The East India Company in 1657 leased the holdings of the almost defunct Guinea Company along the west coast of Africa, including CORMANTINE, Cape Coast and Wyamba; the East India company had just received a new charter and had available funds realized from the sale of additional stock.⁵ East India Company officials desired to use African gold to develop the company's business in India; at the same time, to refute its opponents' charges of monopoly, it issued permits to independent vessels for a fee of ten per cent on goods

¹Donnan, I, pp. 126-36.

²C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, pp. 333, 339, 405.

³Ibid., p. 409.

⁴George Cawston, and A. H. Keane, The Early Chartered Companies, 1296-1858, (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1896), pp. 230-31. Carr, p. xlv.

⁵Cawston and Keane, pp. 230-31.

carried or three pounds per ton on their vessels.¹ The arrangement apparently was profitable; when the Stuart forces were restored to the Crown, East India Company officials applied for a continuation of the arrangement under its new charter.² However, certain royalists, particularly Prince Rupert, wished to develop the gold deposits on the Guinea Coast.³ Further, Nicholas Crispe and his party technically still held exclusive rights that would continue until June, 1662.⁴

Prince Rupert was behind the next company for the Guinea commerce. During the reign of the Cromwellian forces, Rupert spent some time along the Guinea Coast with his several royal vessels.⁵ In 1652 natives of the Gambia river region impressed Rupert with stories concerning rich gold mines in that area; Rupert concluded that the mines to which the natives referred were the same deposits the Negroes had used for some years to furnish the Dutch with gold.⁶ With this information still in mind, Rupert enlisted the aid of the Duke of York and other cavaliers to organize a company to exploit these deposits; this company, entitled "The Company of the Royal Adventurers into Africa," received a charter

¹Ibid., p. 231.

² Annals, I, p. 83.

³Ibid., I, p. 83.

⁴See above, p. 10.

⁵Look, p. 8.

⁶Ibid., p. 8.

on December 13, 1660, and at the same time was praised by Charles II for having "undertaken so hopeful an enterprise."¹

The East India Company still desired to continue its lease on the Guinea coast, and asked the Duke of York in the summer of 1662 if it could obtain a share of the commerce, or at least be allowed to hold its possessions on the Guinea coast until the end of 1664. The Royal Adventurers did not wish to conclude such an agreement, and formal arrangements were made to terminate East India Company interests.²

The Royal Adventurers soon found that they needed more power to cope with the hostility of the Dutch, and on January 10, 1663, a new charter with broader authority was issued to the reorganized company.³ The Duke of York was governor of the company, and many important royal courtiers were among its supporters. The King also exercised his option to become an adventurer.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 8. Zook states that apparently some charge was made for the processing of such charters, in this case a fee of somewhat over £133.

²C.S.P. Col., 1661-63, p. 206.

³Ibid., pp. 120-22. Carr, pp. 172-77. Zook has recorded an excellent history of this company in his Company of Royal Adventurers Trading Into Africa.

⁴Zook, p. 9, n. 13. Reference to Charles II as an adventurer calls to mind some remarks made by Samuel Pepys, taken from George M. Trevelyan, England Under The Stuarts, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924). "During the second Anglo-Dutch war [1665-67], Charles and Parliament were at odds over the conduct of the war, especially concerning income and expenditures: 'Charles was lazy and spendthrift; the Commons was interfering and suspicious. These traits aggravated one another. The more lazy and spendthrift the Commons found Charles to be, the more interfering and suspicious they themselves became. Charles, whenever there was not money enough

The development of the sugar plantations in the West Indies, the population growth in the Leeward Islands and Barbados, and the British acquisition of Jamaica in 1655 were contributing factors to the increased interest in African slaves after the middle of the seventeenth century. It may seem strange, then, that the 1660 charter did not list Negroes among the commodities in which the Company could trade.¹ There is little doubt, however, in the opinion of most writers on the subject, that irrespective of its charter privileges, the company did engage in the slave trade. In the new charter of 1663, slaves were enumerated as one of the items of commerce for the reorganized company.² In 1665, trade in slaves accounted for about one-fourth of the total commerce of the company, bringing in an estimated £100,000. Sold accounted for £200,000, with ivory, wax, hides, wood, and pepper bringing in another £100,000.³

to go round, preferred that his seamen rather than his mistresses should lack.' Pepys also attributed the ill-success of the war itself to the habits of the royal brothers. They 'mind their pleasures and nothing else,' so that 'we must be beaten. When pressing letters arrived from the dockyards or the fighting fleets, Charles might be out walking at four and one-half miles an hour, or idling in bed, in the tennis-court, in the dissection-room, with Lady Castlemaine, or in any retreat but the council chamber.' If at last he was caught and brought into council, he 'played with his dogs and let the others talk undressed.'" Samuel Pepys, The Diary of Samuel Pepys, (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1903-04.) Entries of December 31, 1666; January 7- April 24, 1667.

¹C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, p. 176.

²Carr, pp. xlvi, 180.

³C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, p. 266.

Faced with continual competition and warfare, interference by the interlopers, and the almost impossible task of collecting the debts owed by the West Indies planters, the Royal Adventurers soon discovered that a profitable business was next to impossible; in fact, in the late 1660's the company found itself approaching insolvency.¹ The position of the company was so untenable that by 1669 it was issuing licenses to independent traders instead of conducting its own trade.² Officials of the company were still looking for further financial support and hoped that the company could continue, but its position was so uncertain that nobody wished to invest capital in such a discouraging project.³

In 1672 the Company of Royal Adventurers was re-organized as the Royal African Company. As will be illustrated in the chapter to follow, this completely new concern was by far the most ambitious English effort undertaken in an attempt to control a major share of the commerce along the West Coast of Africa. With the establishment of this new company, the Company of Royal Adventurers relinquished ownership of all its possessions on the Guinea Coast.⁴

¹C.S.P. Dom., 1663-69, p. 459. Donnan, I, pp. 86-88.

²*Ibid.*, I, p. 93.

³*Ibid.*, I, p. 179.

⁴Donnan states that English merchants were slow to recognize the advantages and possibilities for West Indies trade under a large and well-organized joint-stock company, further, that the Royal African Company as established in 1672 was the first English commercial concern for West Indies trade that could be compared to the Dutch West India Company which had been organized a half-century before, in 1621. Donnan, I, p. 78. Briefly and simply stated, the joint-stock

In considering the reason why the African slave trade increased at such a rapid pace after 1650, the answer may lie in the rapid development of the West Indies sugar plantations. This development produced a demand for cheap labor. White labor was not efficient in such a warm climate; moreover, the only whites that could be procured were "felons condemned to death, sturdy beggars, gypsies and other incorrigible rogues, poor, idle, and debauched persons."¹ The plantations were forced to depend upon the African Negroes for labor; the planters soon found also that it cost less to maintain the Negroes and that their efficiency was greater than the white servants.

company implied an arrangement wherein merchants of wealthy means combined their resources for the purpose of obtaining profits well beyond the means of each individual merchant; they were organized on a legal basis and were entitled to returns proportionate to their individual contributions. Usually they were an exclusive financial group with entry closed to independent merchants not of their group. A closer and more definitive examination of the joint-stock concern and its monopolistic practices under a charter gained by favor of the government, as opposed to the regulated company will be made in Chapter II,

¹Edward D. Collins, "Studies in the Colonial Policy of England, 1672-1680," American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1900, p. 147.

CHAPTER II

THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY--

THE DOMESTIC SCENE

When it appeared that the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa¹ was not going to yield profit, some of its members engaged in the independent trade, thereby hastening its downfall. After some negotiation, several members formed an independent trading organization called the "Gambia Adventurers."² To finance the project, the merchants concerned solicited stock in the amount of £15,000; formal agreement on the matter was reached on November 27, 1663, but only after these merchants promoting the arrangement agreed to cede £3,000 worth of "Gambia" stock to the Royal Adventurers.³ In addition, in return for exclusive commercial privileges for seven years along the north Guinea coast,⁴ the Gambia Adventurers agreed to remit an annual fee of £1,000 to the Company of Royal Adventurers;

¹The name of the company was changed somewhat under the charter of 1663 when the words "of England Trading" were inserted.

²Zock, pp. 22-23.

³Ibid., p. 23.

⁴It was understood that their trading interest would be primarily centered in the region of the Gambia river and the Senegal area. Donnay, I, n. 236.

the Gambia promoters also agreed to assume the cost of maintaining the English forts and other establishments within the area of their jurisdiction.¹ It appears that the Gambia venture was not particularly successful; apparently its seamen transported a limited number of Negroes to the West Indies, but its primary commerce seemed to be restricted to elephants' teeth, wax and hides, and other commodities of the Gambia area.²

In 1669 the business of the Company of Royal Adventurers was of such minor consequence that inquiries were made as to whether the Royal Adventurers were still interested in the Guinea trade. In admitting its financial distress, spokesmen for the company laid the blame on the warfare with the Dutch, which had made it necessary to issue permits to independent traders.³ Company officials claimed that additional investors might be secured if the King would pay his subscription,⁴ lend his authority to induce the Barbados planters to pay their debts to the company, and to direct his vessels to defend company possessions on the Guinea coast.⁵ There was some talk of leasing company property and trading privileges on the Gold Coast, similar to the Gambia arrangement, in an

¹Zook, pp. 22-23.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., pp. 23-24. Donnan, I, pp. 172-74.

⁴The King's subscription pledges seem to have been in arrears in the amount of £7,200; however, the company was considerably indebted to the King for the vessels which he had occasionally loaned. Zook, n., 12, 13, 21.

⁵S.C.P. Dec., 1668-69, p. 459. Zook, p. 24. Donnan, I, pp. 176-77.

effort to secure additional income but no definite steps were taken in this direction. With the company about to collapse, to secure fresh financial support appeared next to the impossible; no merchant wished to invest capital which would be used to satisfy creditors rather than to build commercial opportunities in order to secure profits.¹

In the face of such a hopeless situation, an attempt was made to reach an agreeable settlement with the company's creditors; a reorganization under the charter of 1663 was to be the key to the solution.² A proposal to reorganize the company under the existing charter was approved by company officials on May 18, 1671. Under this proposal, existing shares of stock would be re-evaluated and new stock would be issued. The total value of the stock outstanding at this time amounted to £122,000; under the new stock, this would be valued at ten per cent, or £12,200. The most difficult portion of the scheme involved the settlement of company debts, which at this time amounted to £57,000. Much was demanded of the creditors: they would be paid in full one-third of the amounts due to them, i. e., £19,000, this revenue to come from fresh investments in stock subscriptions, and would be paid in six separate monthly installments following formal reorganization; the other two-thirds would be reduced ninety per cent, or from £38,000 to £3,800, and would be paid in shares of stock of the reorganized company. In other words,

¹Ibid., I, pp. 173-79.

²Ibid., I, pp. 175-76.

two-thirds of the debts would receive the same treatment as was proposed for the stock outstanding.¹ Combining the £19,000 cash and the £3,800 in new stock, the creditors would realize not quite thirty-five per cent of the amount owed them.² All values assumed par value for the shares of stock, both of the old company and of the proposed new company, and all calculations were based thereon. If the proposal were refused by the creditors the company indicated its intention of transferring all company holdings to the creditors, and to obtain new and exclusive privileges from the King.³

It was apparent almost immediately that the plan was unacceptable to the company's creditors. Nevertheless, on October 28, 1671, the company formally approved plans to solicit new subscriptions of stock under the plan; the first new subscriptions were taken on November 10.⁴ At the same time the unwilling creditors received notice that "they must accept the arrangement within ten days or the King would revoke the company's patent."⁵ As a further step in attempting to mollify the disgruntled creditors, the general court

¹Reorganization plan from these sources: C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, pp. 119-20. Donnan, I, pp. 174-76. Zook, pp. 24-26. Scott, William H, "The Constitution and Finance of the Royal African Company of England from Its Foundation till 1720," The American Historical Review, VIII, (October, 1902-July, 1903), pp. 241-59. (Hereafter referred to as Scott, A. H. R.)

²See Tables 1, 2, 3, following page.

³Donnan, I, p. 176.

⁴Zook, p. 25.

⁵Ibid., p. 25.

TABLE 1¹

RECONSTRUCTION SCHEME

The existing capital of £122,000 to be written down by 90%.....	£12,200
Creditors for debt of £57,000 to receive two-thirds, or £38,000 in stock of old company. This £38,000 stock was to be likewise written down by 90% and exchanged for stock of new company.....	3,800
Creditors were to receive the remaining third of debt <u>in cash</u> out of subscription below.	
Balance of subscription.....	84,000
Total capital, new company.....	<u>£100,000</u>

TABLE 2¹

ALLOCATION OF CAPITAL OF NEW COMPANY BETWEEN SHAREHOLDERS AND CREDITORS OF THE OLD

Stock new company to shareholders and creditors of old company.....	£16,000
Cash to creditors of old company.....	19,000
Cash available as working capital.....	65,000
	<u>£100,000</u>

TABLE 3¹

POSITION OF THE CREDITORS ON RECONSTRUCTION

For each debt of £100, there was paid in cash one-third.....	£33. 6. 8
The remaining two-thirds of the debt converted into stock of old company for the same amount. This was transferred to stock of the new company at 10% of its nominal value, giving as the equivalent of the remaining £66. 13. 4 of the debt £6. 13. 4 stock of the new company worth at par.....	6.13. 4
	<u>£40 0 0</u>

¹Reprinted from Scott, A. H. R., pp. 243-44.

of the company recommended to increase the cash settlement to forty per cent of the debts, i. e., £22,800.¹ In accepting the ten per cent arrangement, stockholders of the Royal Adventurers were required to relinquish all claim to company property and possessions on the Guinea coast as well as to future fees receivable from the Gambia Adventurers whose lease was valid until November, 1675.²

Subscriptions for the stock of the new company amounted to somewhat more than £110,000, whereas the terms of subscription of October 28, 1671, called for only £100,000; those committing themselves to new stock were required to pay the treasurer in ten monthly payments and had until September 25, 1672, to complete their commitment.³ Of course not the entire amount subscribed would be available for building new business as £35,000 was committed in stock and cash to settle the accounts of the old company. For each £100 in stock of the new company, a subscriber would be entitled to one vote; to be an officer in the reorganized company, an individual was obligated to a subscription of at least £400.⁴

The new members of the reorganized company elected

¹Zock, pp. 25-26.

²Ibid., pp. 25-26. Donnan, I, p. 179.

³C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, pp. 119-20. Zock, p. 26.

⁴Ibid., p. 26. C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, pp. 119-20. In 1714, by which time the company had experienced several reorganizations, and had, in fact, become somewhat of a non-entity, stock in the amount of £500 was required for the privilege of a single vote and to be an officer, £2,000 in stock was required. Scott, A. H. R., p. 245.

the Duke of York¹ to serve as governor; the Earl of Shaftesbury was elected sub-governor;² and John Suckworth was to be deputy governor.³ The governor, the sub-governor, and the deputy governor were to be assisted by twenty-four prominent stockholders. These twenty-four merchants constituted the "court of assistants," of the company, or, as it were, executive council.⁴

It was not considered essential to secure a new charter despite the fact that the new subscription of stock to invalidate the old stock of the Royal Adventurers presented the impression of a completely new company. However, the creditors still considered unacceptable the scheme for liquidation of their loans, even with the increase to forty per cent concerning settlement.⁵ The new subscribers, of course were reluctant to pay for stock, the proceeds for which possibly would go to meet financial obligations of the Company of Royal Adventurers.⁶

¹The Duke of York, brother to Charles II, became King James II. [1685-88]

²Zook states that Lord Ashley was elected sub-governor on January 10, 1672, at a general court of the new subscribers. Zook, p. 26. It appears likely that Ashley later resigned and by September, 1672, when an entirely new charter was granted, Shaftesbury had replaced him.

³Donnan, I, pp. 181-82.

⁴Ibid., I, p. 183. The Royal Adventurers had been controlled by a court of thirty-six assistants and an executive committee of seven. Zook, pp. 13-14.

⁵Donnan, I, pp. 178-79.

⁶Ibid., I, p. 179.

To avoid any possible legal and financial entanglements, the promoters of the reorganization scheme requested of the King a new charter. The new charter was issued on September, 27, 1672, to a completely new company, unencumbered by debts and obligations of the old Royal Adventurers. The name of new company was, "The Royal African Company."¹ The creditors of the old company now had no choice but to accept the arrangement and hope that the new Company would make profits in excess of their losses suffered under the Royal Adventurers. There was also the conviction among the merchants concerned that the old charter would not cover the needs and magnitude of the Royal African Company.² The old stockholders thus dutifully transferred all rights and possessions to the new Company.³

The privileges granted by the King to the Royal African Company under the charter of 1672 were broadly inclusive as to territory and rights, and were of a long-term nature. The Company was granted exclusive privileges of domain and trade from the Cape of Good Hope to Salles in the southern portion of Barbary "inclusive, with all the Islands near, adjoining to those Coasts and comprehended within the limits aforesaid, which regions, countrys, dominions, territories, continents, coasts, places and Islands have been

¹For the charter see Donnan, I, pp. 177-92; C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, pp. 400-12.

²Donnan, I, p. 179.

³Ibid., I, p. 179.

heretofore called or known by the name of South barbery, Guinny, Binny or Angcla or by some or any name or names . . . and all and singular Ports, Harbours, Creeks, Islands, Lakes, and places in the parts of Africa."¹ The term of the patent was for one thousand years with the provision that two elephants were to be given in payment any time any member of the Royal family was present in the company's territory.² The trading privileges were especially granted for the "incouragement . . . in the discovering the Golden mines and settling of Plantations, being an enterprise so laudable and conducing to so worthy an end as to the increase of traffic and Merchandize wherein this nation hath been famous."³

All the rights and special trading privileges enjoyed at any previous time by any patentee, particularly the Royal Adventurers,⁴ were explicitly transferred to the new Company.⁵ Instruction concerning the internal affairs and government occupy a sizeable portion of the charter. Structurally, the Company was to be governed as outlined in the original reorganization proposal.⁶ The stockholders,

¹Ibid., I, p. 130.

²Ibid., I, pp. 130-31.

³Ibid., I, p. 131.

⁴The charter of the Royal Adventurers was specifically nullified. Ibid., I, pp. 173-79.

⁵Ibid., I, pp. 173-79.

⁶See above, pp. 25-26.

205 in number,¹ were instructed to hold a yearly election between January 1 and 20, to elect one governor, one sub-governor, one deputy governor and twenty-four assistants.² To legally carry on business, a quorum of seven officials was required, one of whom was required to be the governor, sub-governor or deputy governor.³

The charter specifically granted to the Company exclusive rights to all gold and silver deposits within its territory.⁴ The Crown, however, claimed title to two-thirds of all gold, and in return promised to foot two-thirds of the expenses "incident to the discovering, buying, keeping, defending, maintaining, working, and transporting of the said Gold;" the Company was to receive one-third of the gold and to pay one-third of the expenses.⁵

Among extremely liberal rights and privileges, the Company was extended the prerogatives of making war to defend itself or gain its rights, to establish courts for the purpose of enforcing its privileges and punishing those who

¹Donnan, I, p. 181. By 1680, the number of stockholders was 198. Scott, A. H. R., p. 245.

²Donnan, I, p. 183. The governmental structure was similar to that of the East India company with the difference that, since a member of the Royal family was honorarily appointed governor of the Royal African Company, this Company had an extra executive position, the office of sub-governor. Scott, A. H. R., p. 245.

³Donnan, I, pp. 182, 186.

⁴Ibid., I, p. 187.

⁵Ibid., I, p. 190.

might violate those privileges.¹ It was also given the right of entry to search for and confiscate any slaves or commodities believed to have been illegally obtained relative to the Company's charter; proceeds from such confiscated slaves or materials were to be divided evenly with the King.² The Company was extended full privileges in "the City of London, as fully as any company of Merchants established by any Letters Patent granted heretofore by us, or any of our predecessors at present do or may enjoy;" complete encouragement and protection were to be afforded the Company by all officials, in the King's service and employ, no matter what their office or nature of appointment might be.³

All members, agents, seamen and officials of the new Company were warned by terms of the charter not to engage in any private trade "directly or indirectly" within Company territory.⁴ The enumerated articles listed in the charter included "Red Wood, Elephants' Teeth, Negro Slaves, Hydes, Wax, Gums, grained or any other the Commodities" of the west African coast.⁵ The charter also specified the form for the "Common Seal" of the Royal African Company, which was to bear on one side "the image of our Royal Person in our Parliament or royal robes, and on the other side an elephant bearing a

¹Ibid., I, pp. 189-90.

²Ibid., I, pp. 188-89.

³Ibid., I, p. 191.

⁴Ibid., I, p. 189.

⁵Ibid., I, p. 188.

castle supported by two negroes."¹ The commercial intent on the Company was thus quite apparent.

After receiving the charter, the Company wished Parliament to implement and confirm its privileges. A bill for that purpose was promoted in the House of Lords, but after a single presentation on the floor was shelved.²

For several years following its formation, the Royal African Company enjoyed prosperity and it seemed indeed that the monopoly it enjoyed would successfully protect its interests. According to an early chronicle on the topic, the energy of the Royal African Company "revived trade, several new forts were erected, and traffic in gold increased to an extent that in 1673 some 50,000 'guineas' were first coined."³

With news of success, the independent traders began their interloping anew. On November 24, 1673, the Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations requested King Charles to "take care that there be no trading from Jamaica to any place in Africa within the Charter of the Royal African Company and not to suffer any ships to be sent thither."⁴ In a Royal Proclamation issued on November 30, 1674, the rights of the

¹Ibid., I, p. 182.

²Scott, A. H. R., p. 245.

³The origin of the name for these coins is quite apparent. The official value of the "Guinea" was 20 shillings. Nevertheless, it always brought 21 shillings. This latter amount was established as its legal value in 1717; its actual worth was approximately 20 shillings and 8 pence. Cawston and Keane, pp. 232-33.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 625.

Royal African Company were reasserted as granted under the charter and those not in the Company were prohibited from trading within the limits of the Company's monopoly on the west African coast. This proclamation was directed especially to His Majesty's subjects in the West Indies plantations, many of whom were actively encouraging the interlopers. The proclamation cited the great investment by the Company and its expense in fortifying and settling "diverse" garrisons, forts and factories, "by which means their trade begins to flourish." Nevertheless, "diverse who are not members of the Royal African Company endeavor to reap the benefit and fruit thereof, and have sent ships to trade, which if permitted, will disable said Company from maintaining said trade." The proclamation concluded by ordering all the King's officials to assist the agents of the Royal African Company to enforce the terms of the charter.¹ It is evident that from the first signs of profitable trading the interlopers challenged the Company's monopoly.

An interesting sidelight to the Company's commercial ventures was its training of orphan boys in the art of navigation and seamanship. On August 19, 1673, Charles had "for the encouragement of the art of navigation" issued a patent to establish and endow a foundation within Christ's Hospital, an orphan's home in London, for forty boys to receive special instruction in navigation and arithmetic. At the same time, the King "hoped" the Royal African Company would

¹10.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 626. Denman, I, pp. 194-96.

help in this program, and on January 11, 1676, he specifically requested the Company to accept as many as possible of the Christ's Hospital apprentices. The Company was to place these boys in the hands of "able and sober" masters and to pay each boy nineteen shillings per lunar month for three years, by which time the boy would be a fully qualified officer. His Majesty recommended to the Royal African Company the promotion of this work "as a matter well pleasing to God and profitable to the public."¹

The early years of the Royal African Company were ones of lucrative profit for the investors. In the three years, 1676-1678, dividends totaling nearly 55 per cent were paid.² However, this financial success bred resentment and jealousy in several quarters. The independent traders and those merchants who were outside the privileges of the monopoly highly resented their exclusion. Stockholders who had suffered losses in the Company of Royal Adventurers, but did not purchase new shares of stock in the Royal African Company, were also bitter.³

A member of the Royal African Company illustrated this resentment in June, 1679, when he wrote:

Mr. Edward Seymour is very bitter, because in the former stock he lost near £400 and is unconcerned in this. He was a subscriber but never paid his money so he envies

¹C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 333.

²Scott, II, pp. 20-21.

³ibid., II, p. 21.

us, and I believe we fare never the better at this time by having the Duke of York as our Governor.¹

However, somewhat later in 1679, this same writer paradoxically states that if the King should request funds, the Company could not possibly extend a loan, "for that's as poor as a courtier . . . we go on paying off our debts that if the company be broke nobody may be sufferers but those that be in it."²

The pessimistic prediction of the last sentence was not borne out by events, for, although the dividends were irregular, in the years from 1678 to 1690, eight dividends were declared that amounted to a yearly average of eight per cent for the thirteen years. At the same time a substantial reserve fund was established, for in 1691 a bonus was declared wherein the amount of each proprietor's stock was quadrupled without additional investment.³

There were several reasons behind the Company's success for the first eighteen or twenty years of its operations. The third Anglo-Dutch war ended in 1674 and with the details of organization and financing out of the way, the Company was in a good position to take advantage of the African slave trade, now that difficulties with that alien competitor had lessened. It will be recalled that a group known as the Gambia Adventurers had been formed by some of the stockholders of the old Royal Adventurers in 1669. On

¹Ibid., II, p. 21.

²Ibid., II, p. 21.

³Ibid., II, pp. 20-21.

October 31, 1678, this group agreed to turn over to the Royal African Company all its guns, ships and merchandise "remaining in possession of the Cambia Adventurers on James Island, Bence Island and Sherbero" in the Cambia River region on the west African coast. The selling price was £12,527 4s. 9d.¹

Another factor favoring the Company was the close support and cooperation received from the Crown. Prior to the Glorious Revolution of 1689, there was little question concerning the King's prerogative in issuing charters of exclusive privileges, although it will be recalled that the Royal African Company requested Parliament to confirm its charter in 1672. The sentiments of most merchants were aptly stated by the "autocratic" governor of the East India Company, Sir Josiah Child; he considered the laws of England a "heap of nonsense, compiled by a few ignorant country gentlemen who hardly know how to make laws for the good government of their own families, much less for the regulation of companies and foreign commerce."² Most of the independent merchants and traders not included in the Company were probably not so opposed to a monopoly but were bitter in their exclusion. They thus exhibited their resentment by reverting to interloping and harassing the Company and its monopoly at every opportunity through judicial attacks and Parliamentary pressure.

¹Lo.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 303.

²Edward E. Bennett, "Parliament and the English African Companies, 1663-1713." Paper read before the meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch, American Historical Association, Seattle, December, 1937, p. 8.

The Company had little to fear from its opponents as long as the influence of the Crown in the areas of trade and finance was respected. Prior to the Glorious Revolution, Parliament heard only two petitions protesting the Company's privileges, one in December, 1680, the other in January, 1681; both were delivered in the House of Commons and were to no avail.¹

The Glorious Revolution signaled the shift of power and influence from the Crown to Parliament. At the same time, the fortunes of the Royal African Company took a sharp turn downward. A clear illustration of the acute decrease in business activity is offered by the fact that in the years 1685, 1686, 1687, and 1688, the Company dispatched thirty-eight, thirty-two, twenty-four, and twenty-four vessels, respectively, on slave-trading expeditions; in 1689, only nine ships were sent out, and in 1690, the number dropped to six, and but three were sent out in 1691.² This information leads one to speculate that perhaps the quadrupling of the proprietors' stock in 1691 was not the result of an actual financial reserve, but rather was dictated by the recognized need to create confidence, false though it might be, in the Company.³

At any rate, it was a poor time to arbitrarily increase the value of the stock. With England involved in

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²C.S.P. Col., 1699, p. 1691.

³Despite a painstaking search, no evidence has been uncovered to substantiate this.

the war of the League of Augsburg, the Company incurred substantial financial reverses. The interlopers increased their activities and the Royal Navy was in no position to offer assistance. At a time when increased capital was desperately needed to continue its commerce, Royal African Company stock, as quoted, began a progressive spiral downward. After the market quotation on Company stock had fluctuated from 52 to 44 during 1692, the Company, on March 27, 1693, made an issue of new shares of stock amounting to £130,350. This stock went for only £40 per share at market price, grossing a total of £72,340. Just preceding this issue, in January, 1693, the quotation had been fairly steady at 46 or 47; during February and March it dropped to 44. Just after the fresh stock issue, the quotation dropped to 41, at which figure it remained through May, 1693. The small bonus that buyers of the new shares enjoyed was soon nullified, when in September, 1693, the quotation dropped to 36. In early October it dropped to 32, its lowest point of the year. The Company's stock then made a slight recovery to 34, which figure it maintained the rest of 1693.¹

The market value of the Company's stock continued its downward trend, with low quotations of 20, 13, 17, and 13, for the years 1694, 1695, 1696, and 1697, respectively. The Company continued to sink into debt; it no longer was capable of sponsoring its own expeditions but was forced to resort to the issuance of permits to private traders in order

¹Scott, A. H. R., p. 251.

to obtain any capital at all.¹

Along with the other great commercial companies, the Royal African Company after 1639 requested that Parliament recognize and confirm its monopolistic trading rights. The Company's assistants petitioned the House of Commons on January 17, 1690, that its monopoly receive Parliamentary approval and requested permission to present legislation for such sanction.² Officials directed attention to the great amount of capital expended by the Company to preserve the Guinea trade and its unceasing efforts to supply the West Indies plantations with slaves, all to the benefit and prestige of England and her colonies. To remove its fears of liquidation by legislation and loss of governmental support, the Company stated that it was essential that Parliament confirm its exclusive privileges as granted by its charter of 1672. During 1691, a number of legislative attempts on behalf of the Company were made in the House of Commons, but opponents of the Company succeeded in engineering the defeat of all such bills.³

As the Company increased its efforts to gain Parliamentary confirmation of its monopoly, opponents of monopolistic concerns redoubled their determination to ruin all such commercial enterprises; Parliament was rapidly becoming

¹Ibid., p. 251.

²Leo F. Stock (ed.), Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America, (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1924), II, p. 16.

³Ibid., pp. 13, 29, 45.

the arena of conflict between the "free traders" as opposed to the disciples of monopoly and exclusive commercial privileges.¹ After the opponents to monopolies had completed an organized attack, which covered a three-year period, on the East India Company, they turned their full vehemence to the Royal African Company.²

At the very time when the Company desperately required moral and financial support, both were lacking; the position of the Company was becoming more insecure by the month. Though only a few years removed, the previous period of influence and prosperity seemed but an illusion by 1694. The disorganization and heavy losses incurred by warfare and interference by the interloper were reflected in the Company's disadvantageous position. It was a period of drastic change in the philosophy of English government, with war and unrest to add to the confusion. The interlopers literally enjoyed a field day in slave commerce and with no forts and settlements to maintain could easily offer more attractive business propositions than could the indebted company. Royal African Company spokesmen argued that it was essential that England enjoy the full benefits of the African trade. Claiming that the only possible method by which English commercial prestige and honor could be upheld on the west coast of Africa was

¹Bennett, p. 9.

²Scott, A. H. R., p. 246. With liberal bribes being offered on both sides, the East India Company in 1693 was extended a new charter, valid for a twenty-one year period. Carr, n. 3. Bennett, p. 9, n. 8-9.

through a joint-stock company, Royal African Company officials in 1694 requested permission of Parliament to continue the Company.¹ In light of the Company's rather questionable legal position, this move required clever maneuvering on the part of Company officials, who recognized the urgency of continuing the Company on a joint-stock basis rather than see a regulated company established.²

Although the number of Royal African Company forts in West Africa had dwindled to eight in number, five on the Gold Coast and three in Guinea, Company spokesmen stated it required an annual expenditure of Company funds in the amount of £20,000 to maintain these forts.³ They also maintained the Company merited consideration because of its heavy losses during the war, which were claimed to be £400,000.⁴ If a regulated company should be established, Company witnesses insisted that a fair price should be paid the Company, rather than the price set by the Company's opponents whose figures

¹Stock, pp. 32-35. Scott, A. H. R., p. 246.

²The Company's adversaries were anxious to see a regulated company established to dominate the African commerce, and were priming their arguments toward that end. As opposed to the joint-stock company, merchants of a regulated company "traded separately on their own capital but were bound to observe certain regulations which were laid down for the good of the whole membership. Any subject could join it by paying the entrance fee and complying with the rules. The joint-stock company, however, was a single corporation with one capital which the members held jointly. When given the sole right to deal in a certain area, such a company was a monopoly which no one could enter unless he could buy stock from its shareholders." Bennett, n. 10.

³Scott, A. H. R., p. 246.

⁴Donnan, I, n. 417.

reflected Company property at substantially devalued prices.¹ Counsel for the Company stressed the argument that the African trade had always in the past been controlled on a joint-stock basis, and that only a joint-stock organization could attract the capital requisite to secure the vast amount of manpower and materiel for an involved undertaking of such vast proportions.² It was also pointed out that only through a joint-stock concern could the necessary unity of policy be maintained in negotiations with the natives; independent merchants, in their zeal for ready returns, might follow an ill-advised course of action in their dealings with the natives, and could thereby arouse the Guinea chiefs in violence against all traders.³

In expressing bitter resentment of the Company's monopoly, its adversaries argued that merchants of other nations traded unmolested within the charter limits of Royal African Company territory; however, an English trader was restrained at every turn in his desire for this freedom of commerce unless he courted the favor of Company agents, and then the Company was uncontrolled in charging whatever toll it chose.⁴ This fee was sometimes as exorbitant as forty per

¹Scott, A. H. R., p. 246. The Company represented its assets at this time as nearly £237,000. Included in this figure were its African forts, valued at £40,000. Company indebtedness was set at approximately £114,000. Stock, II, pp. 184-85. Donnan, I, n. 417.

²Scott, A. H. R., p. 246.

³Ibid., p. 247.

⁴Donnan, I, pp. 377-84. Stock, pp. 32-35. Bennett, p. 9.

cent of cargo value.¹ This was possible, stated Company opponents, because, of sixteen-hundred miles of coastline included in the Royal African Company charter, the Company could patrol only about five-hundred miles, leaving all "Strangers, as French, Dutch, Portuguese, Danes, and Hasburghers" free to trade, the English merchant being hamstrung by a maze of impossible regulations.² The opponents of the Company maintained that since interlopers openly conducted commerce aboard their vessels, the powerless forts unable to stop them, the worth of the forts was dubious.³ The witnesses opposed to the Company's privileges also scoffed at the reputed strength and number of Royal African Company fortifications along the west coast of Africa, stating that they were poorly located from the standpoint of strategy and in many instances indefensible.⁴ It was asserted that if it was an absolute necessity that the forts be kept up and fortified, a regulated company "would consume six times" the trade of a joint-stock venture, thereby enriching His Majesty's customs and providing necessary capital for the maintenance of the forts.⁵ In refuting what Company spokesmen had said, the opposition claimed that precedent had been established for a regulated company engaging in the African

¹Donnan, I, p. 380.

²Ibid., I, pp. 377-84.

³Stock, II, pp. 32-35.

⁴Donnan, I, pp. 377-84.

⁵Ibid., I, p. 383.

trade, since the East India Company had operated on that basis when it had leased the forts on the Gold Coast from 1657-1662.¹

Contrary to what one might have anticipated, following a series of hearings, it was recommended by the Parliamentary committee that the African commerce be carried on by a joint-stock concern; the Company was granted permission to present legislation for that purpose.² After a further series of objections and renewed determination on the part of its opponents to further obstruct the Company, a measure was approved by Parliament to continue the Company on a compromise basis.³ Under this "Act to Settle the Trade to Africa," the Company retained its privileges, but they were modified in favor of the independent merchants; its privileges were also somewhat reduced in terms of geographical inclusiveness, with the northernmost point of the charter now being Cape Mount, about halfway between Sierra Leone and the Grain Coast and a considerable distance south of Sallee, the former northern limit.⁴ The commerce of the independent traders was

¹See above, pp. 14-16. Of course this was no regulated company in the true sense, but rather trade regulated by the East India Company in its own interests. As has been pointed out, the Royal African Company also licensed independent traders at various times.

²Scott, A. H. R., p. 247.

³Scott states that this bill was passed in 1697. Ibid., p. 247. He is possibly in error; according to the reprinted document in Donnan, it was signed by King William on July 5, 1698. Donnan, I, pp. 421-29.

⁴Ibid., I, pp. 421-22. According to Section XVIII: "Provided always, That nothing contained in this Act shall be

legalized in that they were directed to pay to the Company the following charges: on outward voyages from England the Company was to receive a tax of ten per cent on all goods carried; on homeward voyages, the independent traders would be required to pay five per cent on redwood, and ten per cent on all other goods with the important exceptions of gold, silver and Negroes, for which no tax could be demanded.¹

This settlement was to be effective for thirteen years;² it also extended the privilege of establishing processing factories on the west coast of Africa to the private merchants if they so desired.³ The effect of this settlement was to legally open the trade to all merchants who would remit the required charge. The Company was still required to "maintain, support, and defend" all forts.⁴ The Company was thus required to operate under the controls and obligations of a regulated company, but without the attendant privileges.

interpreted to hinder or exclude any Person or Persons from Trading to that part of Africa commonly called Barbary extending Southerly as far as Cape Blanco." This act placed geographical limits on the charter of the Royal African Company, but at the same time did not prevent any seamen, Company or otherwise, from trading anywhere along the west coast of Africa.

¹Ibid., I, pp. 424-28.

²Ibid., I, p. 429.

³Ibid., I, p. 427.

⁴Ibid., I, p. 421.

CHAPTER III

THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA IN FOCUS

In 1672, the year in which the Royal African Company was formally chartered by Charles II, England once again became engaged in a war with Holland. This marked the third war in a period of twenty years between the two great commercial nations. The Treaty of Dover in 1670 between Charles II and Louis XIV obligated England to enter the French conflict against the Dutch. Although the war presented certain difficulties to the Royal African Company, it also allowed time for attention to problems of reorganization. It was probably during this time that careful plans were formulated that produced the fifteen-year period of prosperity that followed.

During the late 1660's and early 1670's when the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa was failing nearly all English trade was carried on by private traders. Most of the English factories and forts along the west coast of Africa were in a state of disrepair. In an attempt to maintain the factories the Royal Adventurers had granted licenses to independent traders, who in return used one-tenth of their cargo space to carry provisions and materials for maintenance to the forts and other

settlements.¹

Regardless of the state of decay into which the forts and factories had fallen and the local warfare brought on by intense competition for the slave trade, the Royal African Company had considerable and formidable holdings on the west coast of Africa in 1672. Up the Gambia River a short distance was the Company's important fort on James Island. This was its most important outpost along the north coast of Guinea where seventy men were garrisoned at a fort. Besides the important slave trade, a factory that exported considerable quantities of elephant's teeth, bees-wax, and cowhides was also maintained here. There were smaller factories on several smaller rivers southeast of the Gambia, namely on the Rio Noones, hisponge, and Calsamança. Company ships also carried on some trade in two other nearby rivers, the Grande and the Cucheo. Important Company factories were maintained at the mouths of the Sierra Leone and Sherbro Rivers, the latter important chiefly as a redwood source. Although the Company had abandoned a factory on the River Seftos, there was still some trade there for elephants' teeth, as well as at Cape Mount for the same commodity. Ships would frequently stay a day or more along the Grain and Quaqua coasts to trade for pepper, Negroes, elephants' teeth, and Quaqua cloths, the latter which were sold on the Gold Coast.²

¹Zock, p. 69.

²C.S.P. Col., 1669-1674, pp. 412-13. Donnan, I, pp. 192-93. "The Quaqua coast extended from the River Lagos to the Cobre or Ancobre [Ancobar] River, between the Ivory and

Although not indicated on most maps, the Company maintained factories on the Gold Coast at Ashinee, Abinee, Dixcove, Anashan, Anto, Succondee, Anamaboo, Wyamba and Aga. During the first Dutch war, the English lost the fort at Cormantine. At the same time English forces took from the Dutch, Cape Coast Castle, which in 1672 was the Company's chief port and place of trade. It was the residence of the Agent-General, and through it was channeled most of the goods and supplies for the lesser factories, and the outgoing gold, elephants' teeth and slaves. At Cape Coast Castle there were at least one hundred Englishmen in addition to numerous slaves.¹ Just west of Cape Coast Castle was the great Dutch castle of Elmina. To the east of Cape Coast the Company had at Accra another factory for gold. A factory for the exclusive processing of slaves was maintained at Ardra, at which place slaves were especially plentiful. The Company factory at Benin was an important source for "great quantities" of cotton commodities which were traded at the Company's great settlement at Cape Coast. Company ships also

Gold coasts. The origin of the name is uncertain but the most frequent explanation offered is that it was given by travelers because of the peculiar sounds made by the natives as they paddled their canoes." Ibid., I, p. 193.

¹The Gold Coast was bounded by Cape Three Points on the west and by the River Volta on the east. Cape Three Points was about sixty miles west of Cape Coast Castle and consisted of three headlands, perhaps ten miles apart. Ashinee was the first commercial town on the Gold Coast, Abinee, a trading post five or six miles east of Cape Three Points; Anamaboo and Cormantine were east of Cape Coast, Succondee was west, about half-way between Cape Three Points and Cape Coast. Ibid., I, p. 193.

traded at New and Old Calabar where there was a brisk trade in slaves and elephants' teeth. In the region of the Rivers Camerons and Gabon slaves were plentiful but no processing facilities were maintained since that area was very unhealthy; Company ships did frequently load a cargo of slaves there, however. Further south, the Company in 1672 formulated plans for the establishment of a factory in the Angola region.¹

Aside from the gold and other commodities that offered commercial opportunities on the west coast of Africa, the colonial powers of Europe held the area in high regard for another reason: its rich supply of Negro slaves offered a source which could be tapped in order to provide the West Indies colonies with adequate labor. This labor could make the plantations in the West Indies productive and prosperous; without labor the plantations would remain barren and relatively valueless except as military outposts. The Dutch had long been the dominant traders on the Guinea coast, but following the Dutch-English war of 1672-74, English traders commanded commerce and rights on the coast at least equal to, if not greater than the Dutch. There was, however, ample competition with the French, Swedes, Danes and Courlanders all zealously protecting their small shares of trade. In addition there was interference from the ubiquitous interloper. Personal differences between the different nationalities, individual and collective, were quite common, and in a region so far removed from the conventions and regulations

¹Ibid., I, p. 193.

of organized society it mattered little whether fair methods or foul were employed to achieve one's objectives. Difficulties between nations many times could be traced to these minor, but magnified, personal differences.¹

In 1673, the Duke of Courland pressed his claim to the fort of St. Andre on a small island near the mouth of the Gambia River. Although there was not a great volume of trade carried on at St. Andre, the fort was strategically located, and the question of who owned it involved circumstances indeed confusing and complicated. The natives had sold it in 1651 to traders representing the Duke of Courland. In the course of warfare in the northern area of Europe, the Swedish sovereign had captured the Duke of Courland, holding him prisoner. Perhaps somewhat overzealously, the Amsterdam "chamber"² of the Dutch West India Company took advantage of the situation by cleverly maneuvering the Duke of Courland's commissioner, Henry Mombert, into an agreement whereby the Amsterdam branch would assume possession of all property belonging to the Duke of Courland in the Gambia River. Under the agreement the Dutch were to control the commerce and keep up the facilities until such time that the Duke of Courland's position would allow his participation in the trade. Although

¹Zook, pp. 23-29.

²In its organization, the Dutch West India Company established "chambers" of Amsterdam, Groningen, Zealand, North Holland and the Maas. In importance, the Amsterdam chamber far out-stripped the others, and was recognized as the "presidential" chamber. Ibid., n. 29.

implementing its provisions, Momber submitted that the agreement could not be legally binding since he lacked the necessary authority to enter into such a treaty. Momber instructed the commander of Fort St. Andre, Otto Steele, to resist the Dutch if possible, the agreement notwithstanding; Steele, however, recognized his position as hopeless in the face of the more powerful Dutch forces. With the Dutch in control, it was not long until a French pirate attacked and captured the island, selling it to a Groningen trader of the Dutch West India Company. Under the rather embarrassing circumstances, the Groningen chamber was of no mind to press matters further, and the island was restored to the Duke of Courland. Mindful of having displeased the Duke of Courland by his foolishness, Momber promptly and gratefully accepted its return in June, 1660. However, vessels of the Amsterdam chamber of the West India Company besieged the island shortly thereafter. After the natives interceded in the interests of the Courlanders, who had been prisoners of the Dutch for a month, the latter were required to retreat to Cape Verde; Steele resumed command.¹

On December 13, 1660, the Company of Royal Adventurers had been granted its charter for exclusive trade along the west African coast. Shortly following its incorporation the company sent Captain Robert Holmes on its initial trading venture, involving five of the King's vessels. When Holmes anchored at Cape Verde in March, 1661, he immediately

¹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

apprised the Dutch commander of King Charles' exclusive prerogatives along the coast and of the Royal Adventurers' monopoly. Holmes then served notice upon the Dutch that they would be given about six months to dispossess their settlements and give up their trading efforts along the coast. To implement his demands, Holmes assumed possession of the island of Boa Vista, to which the Dutch had asserted ownership since 1621.¹ After Holmes had made his demands of the Dutch in March, 1661, he sent one of the English ships up the Gambia; the Courland commander, Otto Steele, opened fire, claiming he was unable to identify the vessel. Holmes' response to this "insult" was a demand that the island be turned over to the English within ten days. After first refusing, Steele recognized that resistance would be futile.² When a fire nearly leveled the fort, the English gave up the island in favor of two nearby islands, naming one Charles Island and the other James Island, for their Royal sponsors. The English thus assumed their first Gambia River property.³

In 1673 the Duke of Courland notified King Charles II that Fort St. Andre and the island on which it stood belonged legally to him. Moreover, he requested that his claim to ownership be legally and officially recognized. The English Sovereign thereupon requested Sir John Buckworth, deputy

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²In a letter dated May 24, 1673, Holmes owned up to the fact that only two men and a boy manned the fort at the time of his demands. U.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 492.

³Zook, pp. 30-31.

governor of the Royal African Company, to investigate the Duke's claim.¹ In a letter dated May 23, 1673, Suckworth informed Charles II that since the English had abandoned the island and fort in 1661, the Duke of Courland was allowed in 1664 to re-occupy the fort. In consideration for the privilege to trade along the west coast of Africa for his own single account, but not for his subjects, to the extent of £12,000 annually, the Duke of Courland had at that time formally transferred ownership of the fort and island to the English King. Suckworth estimated that the Royal African Company's yearly trade to St. Andre would not exceed £6,000.²

King Charles II refused the Duke of Courland's claim, but notified the Company that although the 1664 agreement was made by the Company of Royal Adventurers, the Royal African Company must either honor that agreement or maintain the garrison without trade. The Company decided to continue the earlier arrangement.³

Trade along the Guinea coast was continually beset by interlopers and traders of all nations who generally used fair means or foul to gain their ends. The Royal African Company ship, Hone of Dover in May, 1675, was overpowered and seized by a vessel of the Dutch West India Company. The English vessel, carrying a cargo valued at £3,700, was not returned despite protests from company spokesmen and through

¹C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, pp. 470-91.

²Ibid., pp. 491-92.

³Ibid., p. 492.

diplomatic channels.¹

Nine months later the Alice of London, an interloper under the command of John Gribble, was being pursued off the Gold Coast by several ships of the Royal African Company. Just as the English ships were closing in on the intended victim, a Dutch warship intervened in the interests of the interloper. The Dutch vessel successfully warded off the pursuers, took the interloper to the great Dutch fort at Elmina and confiscated the cargo.²

To strengthen their holdings on the Guinea Coast, the Royal African Company in early 1676 purchased the Danish possession at Fredericksburg.³ The property consisted of only five or six huts and "12 or 14 small guns" but was strategically located on a hill overlooking the English fort, also at Fredericksburg. At the time of this transaction, there were rumors that the Dutch had sent out four ships to forcibly take the Danish property. At the same time, the Danes refused the Company offer to also purchase the Danish fort of Christiansburg at Accra. The Danes did, however, agree to cooperate with the Royal African Company and to obstruct Dutch efforts to trade in the area.⁴

By 1677 the interloper problem was becoming so serious an obstacle to trade that the Company appealed to Charles II

¹C.O.P. vol., 1675-76, p. 315.

²Ibid., p. 345.

³Ibid., p. 323.

⁴Ibid., p. 328.

for assistance. On January 26, 1677, Company officials complained to the King that contrary to previous declarations¹ many independent traders were encroaching upon the preserve of the Company and were trading within the limits of the Company's charter. The complaint stated that the interlopers "have been more cautious by entering at the Customs House their goods as for other Ports and then lading their goods at other places, having at same time ships at sea ready to take in said goods, and then proceed to Africa."² To substantiate its complaint, the Company submitted an affidavit stating that one John Case, master of the Antigua Merchant, had loaded a cargo of goods for Guinea but had registered the cargo as destined for Antigua.³ Charles II thereupon issued an Order in Council staying the ship until her master provided security that "she shall not trade to any port within limits of the Royal African Company Charter."⁴

Later in the same year, on May 4, the Company again complained to the King that independent traders were infringing upon the Company's territory. It seems that the ship, the Blossom, was loading cargo for Guinea. Company spokesmen claimed that several merchants, among them George Farris

¹Orders in Council of September 20, 1672, and September 4, 1674, that is, the Charter of the Royal African Company and the Royal Declaration re-affirming the Charter, respectively. See above, pp. 26-32.

²C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

and John Haw, boasted openly that they were trading within the Royal African Company's franchise.¹ Company officials maintained they had "conclusive evidence" that Parris and Haw planned to sell the Blossom's cargo on the Guinea coast, load Negroes and sell them in the West Indies. To avoid suspicion, the owners had entered the blossom for the Canary Islands.² Charles II referred the matter to the Commissioners of Customs and ordered them to take security from the owners if necessary to prevent the Blossom from trading within the limits of the Company's charter.³

On May 10, just six days later, Company officials presented a petition to King Charles in which it was stated that the Commissioners had taken no action in the Blossom case. Attached to the petition was an affidavit by one John Adams. The affidavit stated "the Blossom is loaded with calicoes, muskets, and other goods proper for Guinea, and that some of the Blossom's seamen said they were going to the Canaries, and thence to Cape Verde⁴ to carry blacks to the West Indies plantations."⁵

To discourage the interloper, the great commercial concerns even cooperated occasionally. Usually engaged in

¹Ibid., p. 73-79.

²Ibid., pp. 78-79.

³Ibid., p. 79.

⁴Cape Verde is just north of the mouth of the Cambia River on the west coast of Africa and was within the limits of the Royal African Company charter.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 83.

the bitterest of competition, the Dutch West India Company and the Royal African Company by 1677 made plans to act in concert "to catch interlopers for the mutual good of both companies."¹ Representatives of the Dutch Company had suggested cooperation in this matter on January 22, 1677. With King Charles' approval on February 1, the Royal African Company entered into negotiations for this purpose.² However, by September of the same year the cooperation had turned to controversy as officials for each company were accusing each other of non-cooperation; moreover, the Dutch pressed for a more equitable share of the West African Negroes.³

One of the important contributing factors to the nearly two decades of prosperity was the Royal African Company's success in making profits despite the interference of the independent traders. The problem of the interloper was continual, but it was kept under relative control; at least the Company managed to out-maneuver the crafty interlopers. By the late 1680's, however, the fact that the Company's financial fortunes were taking a decided turn for the worse was reflected in additional difficulties wherever the Company was operating. In England, it was the anti-royalist Parliament that was upsetting Company favor;⁴ in the West Indies,

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., pp. 145-46.

⁴Among several reasons why an anti-royalist Parliament

interlopers, antagonistic colonial officials who had never been in sympathy with the Company's aims, accurately interpreted the domestic situation to push policies that made the Company position untenable; and everywhere merchants were antagonistic and resentful in their own exclusion from the Company's monopoly. Along the west coast of Africa, Royal African Company vessels had to contend increasingly with the French as well as the Dutch. Although some of the crew escaped, the company vessel, Lady Mary, while anchored at Goffoda in the River Grande, was captured by a French man-of-war on May 26, 1638.¹ By September, 1690, Company officials were requesting Royal Navy convoys for their ships. Because of the war with France, the request was refused.²

The Royal African Company's plight had become so desperate that in 1692 the growing of indigo on the Guinea coast was being experimented in an attempt to bolster the Company's sagging fortunes. Jamaica merchants protested, pointing out that nearly three-fourths of England's indigo was imported from Jamaica and that this enterprise was vital to Jamaica's economic stability. If the Royal African Company was allowed to plant indigo on the west coast of Africa, the industry would be "ruined" in Jamaica.³

could adversely affect the business of the Company were: it could bring pressure to bear to prevent the Company from obtaining the Royal Navy vessels needed for protection; it could frustrate Company attempts to prevent suspected interloping vessels from sailing from English ports.

¹C.S.P. Col., 1685-91, p. 563.

²C.S.P. Col., 1639-92, pp. 318-19.

³Ibid., p. 719.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY IN THE WEST INDIES

It was among the colonists in the English island possessions in the West Indies where the Royal African Company met its greatest opposition. Perhaps this was so because the colonies were so far removed from the authority and laws of the King. The inhabitants of the West Indies colonies were opposed to all monopolies in general, and the Royal African Company offered a focal point upon which all their bitterness and hatred could be manifested.

In the beginning the leading factor behind the slave trade was probably the economy of the West Indies plantations. With the rapid development of the sugar plantations after 1650, the planter's primary requirement became the need for an adequate supply of labor at low cost. This economic cause produced the slave trade, which, from an economic standpoint, was simply a case of demand requiring fulfillment. Possessing this land of great promise and productivity, the early settlers requested labor in adequate force so that the land's potential might be fully realized. It was not intended that this demand for labor should be interpreted as a need for the slave trade, but when trade restrictions and other

factors precluded an adequate supply of white servants, the slave trade became the answer.¹

The picture presented in the West Indies possessions, particularly in Barbados and Jamaica in the 1670's could be compared to any new, recently settled country.² The settlers secured all the land they possibly could, and labored toward clearing and preparing it for planting. Experience had shown the cultivating of sugar to be a successful enterprise; in the planter's eyes, only the shortage of labor prevented lucrative profits. Acquisition of laborers and the materials of cultivation were uppermost in the planter's thinking. The planter could depend only upon his credit to secure his needs, and with his returns from his crops mortgaged by his debts, the success or failure of each season's crop determined his degree of indebtedness. With the planter in constant debt to the merchant, the advantage and welfare of the merchant lay in the colonies remaining dependent upon the home government in England so that the money owed to him by the planters would remain constant in value;³ he could also depend upon Royal authority to assist in its collection, rather than see the planters establish their own laws to the detriment of the merchants. For the planter's part, he resented deeply the regulations for the control of trade;⁴ especially vexing

¹Collins, p. 141.

²C. P. Lucas, A Historical Geography of the British Colonies, (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1900-1913), II, pp. 97-98, 186-92.

³Zook, p. 73.

⁴Lucas, pp. 143-44, 191.

was the Navigation Act of 1660 which ruled that only England must be the recipient of all the colonies' cotton, wool, indigo and sugar.¹

Since the Royal African Company, with its exclusive franchise on the west African coast, could determine how many slaves the plantations would receive, the planters regarded the Company as their chief obstacle to a profitable enterprise.² Moreover, the merchants disliked the Royal African Company's monopoly and the dictatorial prices set for slaves and were convinced that this fact deprived them of additional profits; it was also pointed out to the King in petitions that "His Majesty's customs suffered" as a result of the Royal African Company monopoly, since the Company was exempt from payment of duties.³ Regardless of the deep-seated hatred between the merchants and the planters, they shared one sentiment in common, their mutual distrust for the Royal African Company; there was often collusion between the two groups in opposing the Company's business.⁴

That there existed an ever-present demand for labor is apparent from the many requests to England from the plantations. Complaining that Antigua was sadly lacking in labor, Governor Maynall had in 1656 requested that at least two ships be employed to bring English and Scotch servants

¹C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, pp. 29-30, 45-47, 413.

²C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 174, 304, 339.

³Ibid., pp. 193, 206-07, 232, 333.

⁴Ibid., pp. 337-33.

to the island.¹ Stating that free trade was necessary for the welfare of the plantations, Lord Willoughby in 1667 requested servants from Scotland and a supply of Negroes so that the labor shortage in Barbados could be alleviated.² The Barbados Assembly at the same time petitioned for white laborers from Scotland and estimated their needs of English settlers to be several thousand.³ In the same petition the planters stated that free trade was essential to the plantations and stressed the handicaps of trade under the Navigation Acts.⁴ Willoughby stated to the Privy Council in December, 1667, that "if labor fail here, His Majesty's customs will at home, and if the supply be not of good and sure men, the safety of the place will always be in question, for though there be no enemy abroad, the keeping of slaves in subjection must be provided for."⁵

Although possibly somewhat exaggerated, mention is made of rebellious Negroes in Barbados and Jamaica, causing concern to the inhabitants. One of Cromwell's officers, Vice-Admiral Goodson, had in 1656 reported from Jamaica that "when the negroes found any English straggling in the woods they butchered them with lances."⁶ Writing in October, 1675,

¹C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, pp. 439, 443.

²C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, pp. 413, 487.

³Ibid., p. 413.

⁴Ibid., p. 413.

⁵Ibid., p. 514.

⁶C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 107-08.

Governor Atkins blamed "a damnable design" of the Negroes to destroy all others on Barbados.¹ The Cornantine slaves were listed as especially warlike and robust, so, as an example, Atkins had thirty-five of them executed. Atkins at the same time asked for a supply of servants from Scotland to strengthen the island against such outrages.² Shortly thereafter the planters of Barbados complained that it was doubly difficult to obtain English laborers since additional land was no longer available to them when their term of service was completed.³ They complained that the Navigation Acts prevented the Scots from emigrating, saying that shipmasters would not transport servants when even commodities could not also be imported.⁴

In early December, 1671, Governor Sir Charles Wheeler of the Leeward Islands informed the Council for Foreign Plantations that "at least 4,000" laborers were needed in the Leewards. Englishmen who were in prison for small debts or minor crimes were preferred but that because of the demand, Negroes would have to suffice for "only by Negroes can

¹Ibid., p. 294.

²Ibid., p. 294. Atkins' request could be somewhat ambiguous; one might possibly question whose outrage he was protesting.

³Lucas, II, p. 169. The laborers transported to the colonies were indentured to work for a number of years, usually seven, to pay for their passage from England. These workers ordinarily were members of the lower fringe of society, sometimes criminals, and were normally given their own piece of land when they completed their term of indenture.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 193, 206-07.

these islands be planted until it be clear of woods for more health for the English."¹ Later the same month, Governor Modyford of Jamaica cited the island's need for slaves, maintaining that an abundance of slaves would cause Jamaica "to swell up to a greater felicity and wealth than ever that did."²

The planters thus became solely dependant upon Negro slaves for labor. It was reported from Barbados in 1676 that Negroes were better suited to plantation life than were the white servants, and that they cost less to maintain and were more efficient workers. The Irish were listed as being "especially idle."³ The colonists continued their requests for whites; in April of 1679, the Barbadoes Assembly requested the King to "license six ships yearly" to bring Scots to the island "so white recruits may help lessen the dangers from without and within."⁴ There were also complaints of an acute shortage of Negroes, and the Assembly stated that the ones that were obtained were "bad and useless."⁵ In the same petition, the planters repeated their request for free trade "to advance the slave trade and increase customs."⁶

Much the same situation existed in the other islands

¹C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, pp. 290-91.

²Ibid., p. 304.

³Collins, p. 145.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 969.

⁵Ibid., p. 969.

⁶Ibid., p. 969.

of the West Indies. Jamaica for a long time was relatively uninhabited and in 1669 it was requested that a safe ratio of Christian servants or freemen be maintained relative to the number of Negroes.¹ Governor Sir Thomas Lynch warned in 1684 that he was greatly disturbed concerning the influx of Negroes and the decrease of whites.² In the same year that the Royal African Company was issued its charter, the inhabitants of Nevis requested labor, stating that land without labor was valueless.³

Much attention was given to the colonists' requests for labor, although there remained constantly a demand for additional servants. During the Interregnum Sir Martin Noell, a prominent West Indies merchant, agreed to transport to Jamaica a total of 1,200 men; he was to receive a fee of five and one-half pounds per head, and intended to secure them from Knockfergus, Ireland, and Fort Patrick, Scotland.⁴ Irish boys and girls, one thousand each, of fourteen years or under were to be transported to Jamaica in 1655.⁵ About the same time Noell was licensed to secure prisoners at Dunbar, Plymouth, and Marshalsea.⁶ Without even a trial, English, Scottish, Irish, and Dutch marines, prisoners in the

¹C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 7.

²C.S.P. Col., 1681-85, p. 597.

³C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 396.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1574-1660, p. 441.

⁵Ibid., p. 431.

⁶Ibid., pp. 421, 427.

castle of Plymouth, were ordered to be transported to Barbados.¹ The Council of State in 1656 had ordered that those who should be sent to the plantations included "lewd and dangerous persons, rogues, vagrants, and other idle persons who have no way of livelihood and refuse to work."²

Attempts were made to control the flow of labor to the colonies by setting up registration facilities for those concerned. It was decided that those affected should serve his contractor for a period of four years, unless the laws of the island concerned dictated otherwise; those laborers under twenty years of age, however, would be indentured for seven years.³ The need for such a system was apparent, with the mayor of Bristol in 1662 calling the King's attention to the situation:

Among those who repair to Bristol from all parts to be transported for servants to His Majesty's plantations beyond the seas, some are husbands that have forsaken their wives, other wives who have abandoned their husbands; some are children and apprentices run away from their parents and masters; oftentimes unwary and credulous persons have been tempted on board by men stealers, and many that have been pursued by hue and cry for robberies, burglaries, or breaking prison, do thereby escape the prosecution of law and justice.⁴

The mayor "prayed" for authority to investigate and question all shipmasters registered to Bristol before they sailed to the plantations. He also requested authority to maintain a register of all passengers and seamen on the ships, and to

¹Ibid., p. 423.

²Ibid., p. 447.

³C.S.P., Col., 1661-68, p. 772.

⁴Ibid., p. 331.

inquire "whether they go of their own free will."¹ Merchants, planters and shipmasters also favored a registry since they found it impossible to deal with "spiriting," which had become common; they also complained of individuals who "pretend they were betrayed or carried away without their consent."²

The type of individual who migrated to the colonies was not of the highest character, and cases of poverty presented a continual problem to authorities. Sir Thomas Lynch reported in 1665 that immigrants had come to Jamaica with nothing and soon became impoverished, and that the island received the blame, "people not remembering that air could not have maintained Adam in Paradise if God had not planted for him a Garden."³ Authorities were constantly faced with welfare cases on a mass basis, and in 1673 it was recommended in Barbados that care, housing and work be secured for unfortunates and that steps be taken to prevent the rapid increase of idle beggars.⁴ Governor Atkins stated in 1676 that almost without exception every estate in Barbados was considerably indebted.⁵

The twin factors of poor social stock and unstable economy produced an ideal breeding ground for immorality.

¹Ibid., p. 331.

²Ibid., p. 769. "Spiriting" in this sense refers to individuals who, under false pretenses, were induced to be transported to the West Indies plantations by unscrupulous shipmasters and operators.

³Ibid., p. 934.

⁴Ibid., p. 1116.

⁵Ibid., p. 973.

In July, 1665, John Style wrote from Jamaica, stating, "not the country but the debaucherousness of the people" gives the island a bad name. He requested that prospective emigrants be more selectively screened in place of sending "your convict goat birds or riotous persons, rotten before they are sent forth and at best idle and unfit."¹

The demoralizing condition of Jamaica was blamed by Governor Modyford on "intemperance, sateiting, and carelessness," especially among the old army officers, "who from strict saints are turned the most debauched devils."² The Spanish traders at first "wondered much at the sickness of our people until they knew of the strength of their drinks, but then wondered more that they were not all dead."³

Possibly confusing his principles with his prejudices, since he was now in prison, John Style wrote again in 1670:

The number of tippling houses is now doubly increased, so that there is not now resident upon this place ten men to every house that selleth strong liquors. There are more than 100 licensed houses, besides sugar and rum works that sell without license; and what can that bring but ruin, for many sell their plantations, and either go out for privateers, or, drinking themselves into debt, sell their bodies or are sold for prison fees. Were the most savage heathens here present they might learn cruelty and oppression; the worst of Sodom or the Jews that crucified our Savior might here behold themselves matched, if not outdone, in all evil and wickedness by these who call themselves Christians.⁴

Style also told of "horrid oaths, blasphemies, abuse of

¹Collins, p. 149.

²C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, p. 1085.

³Ibid., p. 1085.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 133.

Scriptures, rapes, whoredoms, and adultries," stating that the authorities ignored all the evil doings.¹

In an attempt to enforce some law and order and to discourage idleness, especially among the younger men who were "disabled from making any settlement in the island," the Council of Jamaica in October, 1671, outlawed both public and private gambling. Upon conviction, the guilty were required to pay double the amount they had won, in addition to a fine of £10 or more. The total fine was to be equally divided among the King, the parish² in which the arrest was made, and the informer.³

Reportedly, very little religious life was in evidence, with the clerics among the rank offenders. Speaking of Barbados, Governor William Willoughby in 1668 said the lives of most ministers "run counter to their doctrines."⁴ Writing in 1671, Governor Wheeler of the Leeward Islands, expressed concern about the religious inspiration available to his people when he found "one drunken orthodox priest, one drunken sectary priest, and one drunken parson who had no orders."⁵ Of the same islands, Governor Stapleton reported in 1676 that "most frequent the churches when they like the

¹Ibid., p. 133.

²The colonies were commonly divided into parishes or administrative and political sub-divisions.

³C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 645.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1661-68, p. 437.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 239.

parson or a fit of devotion comes upon them."¹

It is probable that a major portion of the white population in the West Indies plantations was composed of such characters as have been described. While they probably affected but little the fortunes of the Royal African Company, they were in large share responsible for the disorder, rioting, and discontent in the plantations. This social driftwood provided a handy source of willing manpower for the interlopers and others generally opposed to law and order. The interloping ships reputedly were manned by "desperate rogues," so that no customs officer "durst board them."²

An examination has been made of how the planter's desire for white labor was met with complications and frustrations. The only alternative was to secure Negro slaves. It was considered by the planters "as great a bondage for us to cultivate our plantations without negro slaves as for the Egyptians to make bricks without straw."³ With the Royal African Company as the sole proprietor of slave trading rights on the west African coast, it was inevitable that the inhabitants of the West Indies colonies should resent the monopoly enjoyed by the Company and that the interests of the groups clashed. The record of the Royal African Company in the West Indies is in large share a chronicle of charges, countercharges, accusations and complaints of the two groups,

¹1c.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 1152.

²2c.S.P. Col., 1681-85, pp. 75, 145-46, 243.

³3c.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 1441.

so diametrically opposed in their aims and thinking. It would be well to carefully examine this record.

The wars with the Dutch and the French left the plantations in a state of neglect and disrepair; many a merchant was ruined. Debtors, deserters, and servants saw an avenue of escape in the confusion and upset, leaving the planter with more work and less laborers; in some cases the wives and children of the derelicts added yet another burden.¹ The supply of white servants was further depleted by demands of the King's navy and the need for seamen on merchant vessels. There was inflation brought on by conditions of war and the additional risk of transporting provisions and materials.² Following the French sacking and plundering of the Leewards in 1666³ and the three Dutch wars over a twenty-year period plus the other continual strife common to a frontier area, the West Indies planter was left without slaves, produce, and perhaps his home and land as well.⁴ Governor Stapleton wrote from the Leewards in 1672 that the inhabitants of the plantations "have little or no benefit of the Peace of Breda and are objects of pity, looking daily upon their slaves, horses, and other movables in other men's possessions."⁵

When order was once again restored, the planter had

¹Ibid., p. 503.

²Ibid., p. 396. Lucas, II, pp. 144-48.

³Ibid., pp. 145-46.

⁴Ibid., p. 633.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, pp. 859, 396.

little with which to make a fresh start. He had lost his Negroes and property in many cases, and he lacked both cash and credit with which to secure the men and materials necessary to his livelihood. Labor was still the vital need, both to repair the devastation and to again bring about production. He had no means with which to again purchase the factors of production, not to mention paying old debts.¹

The planter had no choice but to run further in debt. In the face of hardships and obstacles, production began to increase; but, as developments looked encouraging, the price of his one product--sugar--began a downward trend while freight rates spiraled in the other direction. In 1672 freight rates to England were approximately fourteen pounds per ton, four times that of earlier costs.² To compound his difficulties, when prices for his products were low, the planter was forced to make payments on debts contracted when prices were high.³ There was a high rate of mortality among the Negroes, and as a result the planter was often paying twice as much for his labor as should have been the case.⁴

The natural elements were sometimes unkind to the planter. There were frequent hurricanes; in Barbados in August, 1675, hurricanes spread great ruin and devastation, leaving widespread destruction and loss of property and crops

¹Ibid., p. 359.

²Ibid., p. 1062. Lucas, II, pp. 145-46. C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 690.

³Collins, p. 155.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 1062.

in their wake. Within a period of three hours many sugar works and over one thousand houses were destroyed; some two hundred persons were killed with entire families being wiped out in the debris of their houses.¹ Further loss of life and destruction of property was caused in Barbados in 1668 by a fire of major proportions.²

At the time of its organization in 1672, the Royal African Company promised to keep the colonies well supplied with slaves at moderate rates.³ However, the planters did not care for the Company's monopoly and seized every opportunity to obstruct its operations.⁴ The Company was thus unable to sell large numbers of Negroes, being forced to maintain them and eventually sell them at a loss.⁵ The Company in doing business was required to extend credit with little assurance that it would receive payment.⁶ Outstanding debts in large amounts had been a major factor in the failure of previous African slave trading concerns, and the Royal African Company was determined "to steer such a course in the Trade of Negroes, as may prevent their splitting the new Stock on the same Rock."⁷ To implement this policy the

¹C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 690.

²Lucas, p. 190.

³C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 444.

⁴Ibid., p. 444. C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 337-33.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 444.

⁶Ibid., pp. 444, 514.

⁷Ibid., p. 444.

Royal African Company announced it would extend special terms to any planter or merchant who would contract in advance in London for a specified number of slaves. The purchaser was to pay one-third at the time of the contract, one-third within two months following the contract, and the remaining one-third "within six months after the sight of a Certificate, either from the person or persons receiving them, or upon Attestations upon Oath Notarially taken, and past by the Master of the Ship for the time being, or any two or more of the Ship's Officers."¹ The buyer was required to furnish security "to the satisfaction of the Company," and to accept the slaves "so many of them as shall be able to go over the Ship's side alone . . . whether Males or Females, from Twelve Years of age to Forty . . . within Three days after their arrival in the respective Roads of Barbados, the Leeward Islands and Jamaica, and within seven dayes at Virginia, or Maryland."² Under this contract arrangement, the price of slaves at Barbados was £15 per Negro; at Nevis or any of the other Leeward Islands, £16; at Jamaica, £17; at Virginia, £18.³

This price was considerably lower than had been the

¹Ibid., p. 444.

²Ibid., p. 444. A relatively small number of slaves were transported to Virginia and Maryland by the Royal African Company.

³Ibid., p. 444.

case for some time in the West Indies.¹ By saving the expense of factorage, i. e., holding and caring for the slaves while trying to sell them, the Company could offer these lower prices to the planters. The Company reserved the right to sell outright for cash at the best rates the market would support slaves that were not precontracted. They would accept no bills of exchange without security, arranged previously and specifically certified to their agents.²

To further encourage the cooperation of the planters, the Company in November, 1672, had invited Barbados planters to subscribe to Royal African Company stock and "encourages such action so they may be able to influence the policy of the Company for the good of Barbados."³

The governors of the respective colonies in the West Indies were instructed by His Majesty to especially assist the Royal African Company in collection of its debts and to offer particular encouragement in its efforts to build a profitable trade.⁴ That the company would experience difficulties similar to previous African companies in collecting its debts in the islands was indicated by Sir James Russell, who wrote in 1673 that "the constitution of that place and the nature of the people is to get in debt as much as they

¹In January, 1672, prior to the formation of the Royal African Company, Negroes had sold for £22 per head in Jamaica. Ibid., p. 729.

²Ibid., p. 404.

³Ibid., p. 389.

⁴Ibid., pp. 153, 352, 363, 812. C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 511.

can and as long as they may be trusted." Concerning the operation of justice, Russell cited the following case:

Captain Ashton, in his government of Antigua, for reasons known to himself, did make a law that all lands and negroes should be inheritance. It happened after that some ships came and put off their negroes at days prefixed, the time was expired and the merchants expected payment, but the planters failed; they sued for their goods or to have their negroes again, which would not be granted, being an act for inheritance, but they should be extended and put to hire for so much a year, so that the merchant in seven years could not get his principal.¹

For the most part the Company lived up to its agreement to supply the planters with slaves at the pre-contracted prices. Most planters could ill afford to commit themselves in advance for a set number of Negroes; further, they wished to examine the slave merchandise before purchase. According to the agreement of the Company, slaves could be purchased for £15 per head; nevertheless, to be selective a planter was required to pay £20 to £22 or from 3,800 to 4,000 pounds of sugar.²

The Company continued to argue that the planters refused to pay their debts. In November, 1676, Company officials stated that the planters of Jamaica still owed £25,000 for slaves delivered in 1673 and 1674.³ Company records of 1674 showed that 5,220 Negroes had been transported to English plantations. This total may be broken down as follows: 2,320 to Jamaica, 1,720 to Barbados, and 650 to

¹C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, pp. 484-85.

²C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 231-32.

³Ibid., p. 503.

Virginia, and that, in addition, these returns did not include vessels that had been dispatched but not yet arrived.¹ In 1675 there were sent to Jamaica four ships with 1,660 slaves, and in 1676 five ships with 1,540.² Of 1,583 slaves which were transported by the Royal African Company to Barbados in the first six months of 1676, 216 died on the crossing and 400 could not be marketed so were sent to Nevis and Jamaica.³ Governor Atkins reported that between December 1, 1678, and December 1, 1679, there were 1,425 Negroes imported and sold in Barbados by the Royal African Company for £20,520. An additional 484 were received and sold in January, 1680.⁴ In September, 1675, Governor Vaughan stated that Jamaica was well supplied with slaves by the Company, but that the rates were "extraordinary, none being sold under £22."⁵ A year later the Executive Council of Jamaica complained that the Company was not furnishing enough Negroes and that it had become profitable to buy slaves from Royal African Company agents in Barbados and resell them in Jamaica for £24.⁶ The Executive Council report apparently was referring to purchases in lots, for in that year prices for Barbados are listed at fixed rates, £20 to £22 per head for selective buyers, or

¹C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 552.

²C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 503.

³Ibid., p. 431.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 510.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 282.

⁶Ibid., pp. 411-12.

£15 in lots.¹ The Barbados Assembly in the early part of 1677 claimed that the Royal African Company's business amounted to £40,000 to £50,000 annually. If the bad debts are considered, the indications would be that the island was well supplied with slaves.² This conclusion is supported by the existence of the local trade between Barbados and Jamaica.³ Between April 5, 1675, and June 17, 1676, there were twenty-one Royal African Company vessels dispatched from the Guinea coast. These ships carried a total of 5,965 slaves, of which number, 2,180 were destined for Barbados, 2,170 for Jamaica, 935 for Nevis and 680 for Virginia.⁴

It appears that the Company was succeeding fairly well in attempting to fulfill its propositions to supply adequately the plantations with slaves. However, the planters were slow in meeting their debts, and it was claimed that they also overvalued their commodities, at the ratio of £100 to £70. In November, 1676, Company officials were concerned about the laxity of the planters in meeting their debts, "otherwise the Royal African Company will not be able to continue as they so earnestly desire . . . further, that the planters' commodities which they value at £100 will not bring £70 in England."⁵ It was also stated that the planters

¹Ibid., pp. 337-83.

²Ibid., pp. 337-83. C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 11.

³C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 304, 411-12.

⁴Ibid., pp. 387-88.

⁵Ibid., p. 503.

thus had no just cause to complain that they were not properly supplied with Negroes.

The Spanish demand for slaves had always been an important factor in the colonies. The Spanish followed the policy of issuing an Asiento, or contract, to supply its colonies with slaves. The Asiento was held at different times by different nations, but the English seemed always to get a major share of the trade.¹ The Royal African Company naturally was desirous of securing the Spanish commerce and made preparations at Jamaica for the trade.² The Company could furnish Negroes at advantageous rates to Jamaica, since it was calculated to be nearly twenty per cent cheaper for the Asientoists to give 110 pieces of eight at Jamaica than at Curacao, the Dutch market.³ The trade proved so profitable that in 1676, the Company, unable to deliver the contracted number of Negroes to Signor Grillos who held the Asiento, petitioned the King to allow the Spaniards to purchase the additional Negroes from the planters.⁴ Granting the request, the King directed Governor Atkins at Barbados, where the Spanish would also pick up slaves, and Governor Vaughan at Jamaica to exact no more than normal duties from the Spanish and to take special care that they were "civilly treated." In other words, Grillos' agents were to receive the same

¹Dennan, I, pp. 104-21.

²Ibid., I, pp. 197-98.

³Ibid., I, p. 197. C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 205.

⁴C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 342, 504.

privileges and immunities as enjoyed by the Royal African Company.¹ In May, 1677, Governor Atkins reported the arrival of a Spanish vessel at Barbados. At the same time, Atkins enthusiastically endorsed the plan, pointing out the great advantage to both the Company and the planters, since the latter "would be better able to pay their debts and rid themselves of their refractory, dangerous and bad Negroes." Atkins thought Barbados well situated as a market:

The Company cannot send their ships hither soe exactly as to meet them here, not knowing when they will come; and to keep negroes in their hands in expectacon of them will be noe ways profitable. There will be always a Stock ready upon the Island for the Spaniard, which will invite him to come to buy, because first of that certainty; next being within ten or twelve days' sail of the Port the Havana, where they carry them all unto. By this means the Guinea Company will bee much advanced in their sales, as well as in the number as the prices of their negroes; the Island, by this money trade, will increase in wealth; and--it may grow to bee soe considerable that a duty, of some advantage, may rise to his Matie.²

Governor Vaughan submitted a similar report in October of the same year, stating that two Spanish ships had traded in Jamaica and expressing his belief that the "trade will prove of infinite advantage to the Royal Company and this place."³

However, no sooner had this trade started than it was declared illegal. The Solicitor-General in January, 1678, ruled that Negroes were goods and commodities, and under the Navigation Acts were thus forbidden to be exported from His

¹C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 84.

²Ibid., pp. 84-85.

³Ibid., p. 169. If the planters were in a position to sell slaves to the Spanish, as is indicated by these reports, apparently they were not in such dire need of negroes.

Majesty's plantations in other than English ships.¹ However, the brief experience had demonstrated to the colonists the profits of such trade; interloping was thus encouraged. Too, the formation of the French Senegal Company about this time, and the conflict of interests between the Dutch and the French in the West Indies, served to place the English in an even more favorable position concerning the Spanish trade.²

It was one thing to prevent an interloping vessel sailing from England where His Majesty's power was paramount. When the demanded security had been provided, however, it was something else again to prevent the interloper from trading along the Guinea coast. It was a physical impossibility for the Company to maintain effective surveillance against violations of its privileges, and it is safe to say that not many vessels held to any promise not to violate the Company's charter. Moreover, to the African native one ship was as good as another. It was in the Company's attempt to prevent the landing of slaves in the West Indies that the conflict of interests and purposes became fiercest and most final. If the Company failed in the colonies, it was thoroughly defeated, and here the opposition was the most determined and difficult with which to deal. The planter was lawmaker, lawbreaker, witness, jury, judge, and executioner! The chief argument of the planter was that the Company did not furnish

¹Ibid., pp. 209-10.

²C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, p. 969. C.S.P. Col., 1677-30, pp. 313, 559.

enough Negroes, and that the ones they furnished were forced onto the planters at exorbitant rates; further, that the monopoly enjoyed by the Company encouraged illegal trade, thus depriving His Majesty of rightful customs.¹ The Company contended that the planters did not buy when they had the opportunity and that it was constantly on the brink of insolvency because of the planters' inability or refusal to pay their debts.²

In 1675, Company agents on Barbados seized eighty of one-hundred-fifty Negroes illegally imported by an interloper, but the Negroes were "violently abducted" by the planters, and the agents severely beaten and wounded in the process.³ Company agents reported that lack of manpower and vessels prevented further retaliation. At the same time, the agents reported their knowledge of eight to ten interloping vessels operating in the area,

so that wee now expect to see a Fleet of them, without any hopes of assistance, or any means to prevent their landing their Negros . . . all persons appearing against us, and are ready to help Interlopers all they can, if some speedy course bee not taken to prevent them, they will reap the benefit, and the Compa., have the least share of the Guiney Trade.⁴

On December 10, 1675:

Wee have now notice of another small Interloper that hath plyed 2 or 3 days, about the windward part of ye Island, and there landed about Ninety Negroes . . . Shee never

¹C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 174, 193, 373, 475.

²Ibid., pp. 387-88.

³Ibid., pp. 359, 496-97, 504.

⁴Ibid., pp. 496-97, 504.

came in sight of this part of ye Island, but after landing her Negroes went to Leeward, its said to Sta. Lucia, there to lade timber, and then come back hither, supposing thereby to conceal her being at Guiney.¹

Despite the King's warning that no person "may shelter in His Majesty's service" to cover for interloping activities,² Company agents in May, 1677, reported that William Sharpe, a chief judge, was engaged in interloping.³ The interloping vessel, owned by Sharpe, two of his assistants, John Worsam and Philip Cheeke, Major John Hallet, and a commissioner of customs, Roger Cowley, brought ninety-eight Negroes and "few or no elephants' teeth." This encouraged others, "seeing those that sit in great places and live by the King's Commissions presume to act as they do."⁴ On advice of her arrival the agents made all possible haste to the place where she was landing the Negroes, but it was twelve miles distant, and they found the Negroes landed and transported to Colonel Richard Bailey's plantation, which was so close to the landing place that "they are no sooner ashore than in it."⁵ The agents demanded that Judge Sharpe be dismissed for such disobedience to the King's commands, whereupon Governor Atkins reported in March, 1680, that he had done so.⁶

¹Ibid., pp. 278, 496-97, 504.

²C.S.P. Col., 1669-74, p. 363.

³C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, pp. 93-94.

⁴Ibid., p. 93.

⁵Ibid., p. 93.

⁶Ibid., pp. 93, 504.

On June 16, 1677, another interloper arrived in Barbados, and landed one-hundred-twenty Negroes on the back part of the island. Company agents were busy on the Company's ship selling Negroes, and so had no notice, and the men they had employed to give notice were beaten and wounded without cause.¹ Company agents reported from Nevis in July, 1630, that "Thornbury an Interloper" anchored a short distance to the windward side of the Royal African Company fort on June 15, and "there rid 4 or 5 days in Sight of all the Island till he had landed his negroes to whom boates from the Shore & Ships went to and againe very frequent."² A warrant was issued directing the marshal "to sease said ship & Negroes & bring them under Command which was delivered to him that afternoon who promised to doe itt with all speed butt instead thereof went out of the way & never did itt."³ About sunset on June 16,

they brought from said ship about 50 negroes in a Sloop and landed them in Stanley-bay where wee endeavoured to seize them butt was prevented by Mr. Phillip Lee Speaker of the Assembly who first drew his Sword and bid defiance to any that would seize them, together with Mr. Richard Cary, Thomas Belchamber, Lt. John Lockwell, Mns. John Standley & one Austerman, all standing with their Swords pointing to our breast and some their Pistolls, swearing bitterly that they would kill that man that would offer to seize a negro there notwithstanding they had at that very Instant the Generalls order read to them wherein he Comanded all his Comd Officers to assist us in the seizing of those negroes of which they would take no Notice, but instead of obeying the same they with about 20 saylers and privateers accompanying

¹Ibid., p. 94.

²Ibid., pp. 579-80.

³Ibid., pp. 579-80.

them with their Swords drawne kept us from making any Seizure on them, saying that they had bought them and would land them if they died for itt, and what they did they would maintaine with their lives and fortunes of which the next day wee acquainted the General who gave us this answer that he knew no law to punish them for itt but would acquaint the King thereof.¹

These are but a few of the countless reports of interloping activities. Moreover, proclamations, instructions to Governors, reprimands, orders in council were of no avail to stop such practices.² The Royal officers might possess all the good intention in the world; they had not the power to stop the traffic.³ Yet, even under these difficulties combined with the growing indebtedness of the planters, these years were the high point for the Company in terms of prosperity.⁴ Notwithstanding the widespread interloping, the illegal traders probably were required to pay higher wages to seamen, higher prices for goods, and Company agents reported they were still able to undersell the interlopers.

However, despite the Company's earnest efforts to really make it worth the planter's while to do business with it and make prompt payments, difficulties continued to grow and the conflict of interests became progressively more intense.

The case for the planters took the form of numerous

¹Ibid., pp. 579-80. The "general" to whom the agents refer is Sir William Stapleton, governor of the Leeward Islands.

²C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 366-67, 511. C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 331. C.S.P. Col., 1681-85, pp. 236, 400.

³C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, p. 560.

⁴See above, pp. 33-34.

petitions to the King, with testimonials and memorials offered as supporting evidence.¹ It became a battle of petitions. One petition of November 4, 1630 from Jamaica was almost a copy of those from Barbados and the other English colonies in the West Indies. Concerning the regulating of the Negro traffic:

The Inhabitants only pray that the foundation of the patent may bee kept which they conceive was that the Compa. would improve the Trade by fully furnishing and at moderate rates: As to quantity its' supposed 3 or 4000 every year would sell and every year more and more; As to the price £16 or £17 per head for letts; (in which are no refuse Negroes) at six months credit which rate the Compa. cannot in reason find fault with seeing many affirm they seldom cost the Compa. above, but often under the moyety of that price, and others (if permitted) would furnish fully at £14 a head . . . And it is well for the said Compa. (if ever paid that the Island is in their debt, and ye Islanders are under noe great obligations to the Company for biting and devouring them by such unreasonable and unconscionable dealing²

The "unreasonable and unconscionable dealing" to which the planters refer is the twenty per cent interest rate charged on the first six months of the slave contract and the fifteen per cent on the debt after that time.³ The petition also complained that the upkeep of frigates to protect Company trade put His Majesty to great expense. It was also pointed out that in obeying orders in favor of the

¹C.S.P. Col., 1662-74, pp. 316, 478. C.S.P. Col., 1675-76, pp. 217, 229, 231-32. C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, pp. 621, 626-27. C.S.P. Col., 1681-85, p. 236. C.S.P. Col., 1689-92, pp. 106-07.

²C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, pp. 626-27.

³Ibid., p. 626.

Company, governors and masters of vessels, as well as other officials, were subjected to law suits and other difficulties. The planters "prayed" that His Majesty would order a regulated slave trade, with full protection for the planters, enforced by an act of Parliament if necessary.¹

This petition reveals clearly the collusion between those who were fighting the Company in the plantations and those merchants in England who continually protested the Company's monopoly. The planters reiterated the old complaint on the great and unsatisfied need of the island for Negroes and the exorbitant rates charged by the Company for those they did furnish, the excessive interest charged, and pointed out the harm done to the nation by confining the trade to a single company.²

As rebuttal to these charges, the Company merely made disclosure of accounts to show that Jamaica planters, as of August 10, 1679, owed the Company approximately £110,000.³ Company accounts revealed that the planters of Barbados owed more than £90,000 as of December 31, 1679; and the planters of Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, and St. Kitts owed a combined total of £57,000 up to July 30, 1680. The Company pointed out that each Negro cost an average of five or six pounds and that ordinary mortality rates took twenty-five per cent of a cargo. In addition, £20,000 was required

¹Ibid., pp. 626-27.

²Ibid., pp. 626-27.

³Ibid., pp. 625-26.

for the upkeep of the forts each year.¹

In presenting its case, the Company of course made the most of the planters' indebtedness and its apparent inability to collect these long overdue debts. Upon recommendation of the Lords of Trade and Plantations the Company did agree to meet the planters' demand to supply Jamaica with 3,000 merchantable Negroes each year, provided they had good payment for their debts contracted there.² The Company instructed its agents to sell these Negroes for £13 per head on six months' time with good security, and that they likewise take special care to see that the other plantations were well supplied, particularly St. Christopher's and Montserrat.³ Both of the latter colonies had recently complained that they had been poorly supplied with slaves.⁴

However, despite the appearance of settlement, difficulties continued. Sir Thomas Lynch, who had replaced Lord Vaughan as Jamaica's governor, complained in September, 1682, that Jamaica was still in dire need of Negroes and that "the last ship had more buyers than negroes."⁵

The planters, however, had not improved concerning payment of debts, and in January, 1683, the Royal African Company requested His Majesty to release them from their

¹Ibid., p. 625.

²Ibid., p. 629.

³Ibid., p. 629.

⁴Ibid., pp. 573-75.

⁵C.S.P. Col., 1691-85, pp. 236, 301-02.

agreement to supply 3,000 slaves annually to Jamaica.¹ To support its request, the Company contended that "light Spanish money passes in Jamaica without any determined weight" thus forcing down the actual price of Negroes.² The Company also claimed that increased interloping had raised the price of Negroes on the Guinea coast by over one-third, and in some cases one-half, over the 1690 price; it was also stated that in many instances it was difficult to procure Negroes at all.³ Since the prices of commodities were also inflated, payments made in goods were no improvement over cash payments. These combined facts operated to keep the trade away from Jamaica; the Company ordered ships sent there to fulfill its obligations, although aware of the unfavorable conditions. However, the masters, who received their pay for freight carried in Negroes, frequently flatly refused to go to Jamaica, but took a port that offered a more favorable market.⁴ With these difficulties all working against the Company, anticipated profits were transformed into losses, and the Company argued the stock had failed to pay interest to the investors.

The planters immediately replied, saying that the Royal African Company had mismanaged its business in Jamaica, and that its agents had been corrupt in their affairs by converting Company property to their own use and keeping

¹Ibid., p. 370.

²Ibid., p. 370.

³Ibid., pp. 370, 525-26.

⁴Ibid., pp. 370, 525-26.

records in their heads or pockets.¹ It was charged that the Company employed bookkeepers who intentionally failed to give credit for money received, or discharged entire lots of Negroes and forged bonds to save themselves. As a result, the planters asserted they only owed about half of what the Company claimed. It was stated that the light money had been at its current rates for years and "will at all times pass from them for as good value as when passed to them."² It was argued that private traders found it profitable to sell slaves at £18 per head, and further, there were plenty of masters willing to go to Jamaica, "though some may not like the Company's terms."³

In view of all the circumstances, it was recommended by the Lords of Trade that the order concerning the supply and rates of Negroes for Jamaica be repealed, and that the Royal African Company, instead, be obliged to furnish the island with 5,000 slaves for the first year and 3,000 yearly thereafter.⁴ It was directed that the Company and His Majesty's officers in the island be assisted in the recovery of the Company's debts and in the restraint of interlopers, and encouraged in expanding its trade.⁵ There was no mention concerning regulation of rates, but of course the over-abundant

¹Ibid., pp. 373, 427.

²Ibid., p. 378.

³Ibid., pp. 373, 471, 474, 512-13.

⁴Ibid., pp. 383-34, 336.

⁵Ibid., pp. 396, 536, 544, 612.

supply would naturally have the effect of keeping the market price low, much to the detriment of Company profits.

From the Company's point of view, these provisions offered little improvement; the Company soon reiterated its urgent desire to be released from them on the grounds that they did not represent the intent and meaning of the Lords of Trade.¹ The matter was referred to the Lords of Trade again, and it was directed that the Company should for the first year furnish 3,000 slaves, and thereafter as the act to be passed in Jamaica should direct. Again there was no mention of rates.²

It is quite evident that the anti-monopolists and proponents of unrestricted trade were making their influence felt in Commons; the planters of course were pleased as this made matters even more difficult for the Royal African Company. In Jamaica it had the desired effect, for in June, 1634, Governor Lynch reported that the Royal African Company "is now beginning" to bring a good supply of slaves, there "presently being two ships with 700 slaves in port." Lynch stated that if the Spaniards did not return to buy slaves, Jamaica would not want 5,000 negroes a year "nor the law to make the Company furnish 3,000."³

The Company reported that during the year from August, 1632, to August, 1633, it had consigned eleven ships to

¹Ibid., pp. 525-26.

²Ibid., pp. 525-26, 530, 536.

³Ibid., p. 625.

Jamaica with a total of 3,460 slaves, and eighteen ships to Barbados with 6,380 slaves.¹ At the same time it claimed that the planters of the West Indies were still indebted to the Company to the extent of £130,000, and asked that it be released from the regulation to supply Jamaica with 3,000 slaves yearly, claiming it was impossible to consistently supply so many Negroes. "We hope that the King, having incorporated us, will not subject us to terms which must be our ruin."²

In November, 1683, the Royal African Company protested a law passed in St. Christopher's, providing that creditors who sue debtors and proceed to execution shall be bound to levy the debt on such things as the debtor shall show, which shall be appraised by three of the debtor's neighbors, and accepted at their valuation by the creditor, who shall pay the debtor forthwith the overplus thereof.³

The Company in October, 1686, presented a petition to the King, stating the difficulties under which it had labored for several years to support the forts, and keep the trade from going to the Dutch and other nations, but because of interloping and damages done to the business by the planter's refusal to meet their just debts, no benefit had been reaped from the trade. The plantations possessed so many remote ports, and the Negroes were so clandestinely landed, that all punishment was avoided.⁴ The Company asked

¹Ibid., pp. 486, 532.

²Ibid., pp. 525-26.

³Ibid., p. 533.

⁴C. S. P. Col., 1685-88, p. 257.

the King to instruct the governors of the several plantations to be more conscientious in apprehending and punishing interlopers.¹ In July of 1639, the Company protested an act passed by the Assembly of Jamaica for setting the value of Spanish pieces-of-eight at six shillings. The Company complained that the planters of Jamaica owed £90,000, and that the act would defraud the Company of one-fifth of its legal debt.² An order-in-council of October 17, 1639, sustained the Company's protest, and the act was disallowed.³

The Company continued its futile efforts to collect its debts in the plantations, but for all practical business purposes it was ruined. Spurred by political events in England, the planters continued to harass the Company's business at every opportunity. Nobody in the West Indies cared for the Company and now that it lacked the necessary Royal favor, it could not hope to continue as a solvent business in such hostile surroundings.

¹Ibid., p. 257.

²C.S.P. Col., 1639-92, pp. 92, 107-08.

³Ibid., p. 160.

CHAPTER V

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE FAILURE OF THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

There have been a number of theories advanced in an attempt to explain the severe business difficulties of the Royal African Company. Underlying most speculation are two factors which stand out in clear relief under the light of careful examination. The inability or refusal of the West Indies planters to pay their debts for slaves received was a prime factor in causing the financial collapse of the Company. On the other hand, the failure of the planters to meet their financial obligations to the Company was caused in part by the planters' resentment of the restrictive monopolistic policy which the Company maintained. Each factor reacted disastrously upon the other.

The planters were incessant in their requests for free trade so that they could secure at low cost the labor necessary to work their plantations. Encountering only frustration and disappointment in their desires, they transformed this bitterness into efforts to obstruct the Royal African Company at every opportunity. As has been outlined, colonial governments of the various West Indies islands passed legislation designed to nullify the Company's privileges

and attempts to collect payments. By the time the Company had forwarded its protests to the King and His Majesty in turn had notified the colonial governors of his displeasure, Company efforts to exact payment had been lost in a maze of regulations, or fresh legislation antagonistic to the Company had been passed by the colonists. Whether the obstructionist practices of the planter were born of legislation or otherwise, these became effective factors in hampering Company trade. Indicative of colonial legislation directed against the Royal African Company was the law enacted by the Jamaica Assembly to empower the Chancellor of Jamaica to suspend proceedings if creditors pressed their suits for payment.¹ The Lords of Trade and Plantations, of course, disapproved this action.²

Against the background of such laws and practices, the countless directives and orders issued to the governors were of little avail. Many of the King's servants were themselves opposed to the Company's monopoly and directly or indirectly maneuvered in favor of its opponents or even clandestinely traded for their personal gain. Judging from the treatment accorded acknowledged debts, it is not too difficult to ascertain the planter's sentiments and actions concerning cases of illicit trading and similar violations of the Company's exclusive privileges.

Despite this opposition the Royal African Company began operations in 1672 under conditions as favorable as

¹C.S.P. Col., 1677-80, pp. 630-31.

²Ibid., pp. 633-37.

any such trading concern could expect. There existed in the plantations an insatiable demand for Negro slaves; there was a generous source of slaves on the west African coast, and prices of slaves were still within reason. The Royal African Company was extended exclusive privileges, as broad in geographical and legal scope and as authoritative as could be desired. The Crown offered protection to the Company to the fullest extent of its authority. The Company commanded more extensive resources and capital for the West African commerce than had any previous English company. At the time of the Company's incorporation England was involved in warfare with the Dutch, but the disadvantages and hardships of the Dutch wars had, for the most part, been absorbed by the previous Company of Royal Adventurers. In fact, it was not long before the English and Dutch were in concert against their mutual antagonist, the interloper, whose activities were detrimental to the commerce of both nations. The Royal Authority was continually invoked in favor of the Royal African Company, on the African coast, in the West Indies colonies, and in England.

The Royal African Company with its charter which induced, in practice, monopolistic restriction of trade, was out of pace with the times. The charter on which it was founded and the principles upon which its business was conducted proved to be inconsistent with the development of world commerce. The Company operated on the faulty assumption that the slave commerce existed for the profit of the Company.

Rather than a policy of expansion and adaptation, the Royal African Company attempted to control the slave trade by compulsion and force. Rather than adjust to the Company's dictates, its opponents viewed their exclusion as an inducement, an invitation as it were, to violate the Company's privileges. The independent traders, under no obligation to anyone and without the expense of maintaining forts, vessels for patrol, and a small army of employees, were prepared to offer more attractive business propositions to purchasers of slaves than could the Company with heavy overhead operating expenses.

Once the Royal African Company began its system of control, the system became progressively more cumbersome under the weight of regulations and prohibitive clauses, directed toward enforcement of its monopoly. The economic development of the plantations was hampered. This loss of momentum in development may well have accounted in part for the very poor social conditions in some of the West Indies islands. Also, the operation of the Royal African Company charter led to complications with foreign powers. The attempts by the Crown to lend its authority to enforce the Company's privileges caused a heavy demand upon its resources and much bother and embarrassment to government officials. Moreover, the Company failed to attain a single one of its proclaimed objectives; the government incurred substantial debts and obligations, the colonies were retarded in their economic development, independent merchants rankled under the Company's restrictive policies, the development of trade and commerce was hampered,

and the Company ended in financial ruin.

It was impossible for the Royal African Company to enforce its prohibitive regulations. The Company had to bear a heavy expense for outlay of vessels, agents, forts, seamen, settlements, goods and materials. It placed itself under obligation to furnish adequate numbers of slaves to the plantations and it was required to prevent other nations from securing the trade. Perforce, it was required to patrol the seas. The interlopers operated with a free hand, under none of these handicaps. On the African coast, the natives did business where they could secure the most favorable conditions; by selling at cheaper than Company rates, the interlopers gained the assistance of the West Indies planters in landing their slaves. Company agents were consistent in their attestations of their inability to deal with the interlopers. With small creeks, coves, and islands, nature offered assistance to the interlopers in their attempts to evade authority. If the violators were apprehended, they as often as not effectively resisted arrest by means of violence. To pursue a case through the courts was so slow and cumbersome that the original suit might be lost in the confusion of charge and countercharge.

Within its own organization, the Company could be no better than were its servants, and many of them could see more profit in trading for their own gain than in serving strictly for the gain of the Royal African Company. With the distances involved and with the voucher record dependent

upon the honesty of the agents, the Company was required to trust its servants in every respect in their conduct of its business. It is probable that shipmasters and other officers took their "cut" from company business in addition to sometimes carrying on a private trade, albeit small. Very seldom were the interests of its servants in line with those of the Royal African Company, and in that frame of reference, the circumstances of the business encouraged graft. There were losses at every point within the organization of the Company with each servant seeking an extra share of the profits wherever possible.

Despite the full support and authority of the government in enforcing its exclusive privileges, the Royal African Company failed in its role of middleman in the business of supplying slaves to the plantations. Rather than recognize that some degree of cooperation and interdependence may have been required for success, the Royal African Company proceeded independently and by restriction. The Company consumed vast resources and was a drain upon the Royal Treasury. Rather than solicit the goodwill and cooperation of the planters and independent merchants, the Company antagonized its clients and irritated so many who felt the force of its monopoly. It may be fairly questioned if any slave trading organization based on the same policies could have succeeded in the enterprise.

This study may perhaps claim special interest because it further illustrates the manifold changes of the

latter part of the seventeenth century. Among the more important of these changes was further refutation of the "Divine Right" of the English Sovereign, and the culmination of the contest in the Glorious Revolution. At least, this alteration in the balance of power in England had its effect on the fortunes of the Royal African Company.

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